Securing better health for Scotland’s infants, children and young people

A vision for 2016
Why we need to improve the health of infants, children and young people

Child health in Scotland is amongst the poorest in Western Europe. Over 210,000 children live in poverty, 28% are overweight or obese and approximately 400 of our infants, children and young people die each year, with a significant number of these deaths potentially avoidable.

There have been some notable improvements over recent years but the rate of improvement is slower than it should be.

Healthcare professionals have a key role to play in tackling these challenges; but safeguarding child health also requires political will and leadership. There are great opportunities to use our devolved powers to prioritise the health and wellbeing needs of infants, children and young people, and make Scotland the best place in the world in which to grow up.

RCPCH Scotland calls on the next Scottish Government to ensure the right to health of infants, children and young people are upheld by:

1. Tackling child health inequalities
2. Preventing ill health by acting early and intervening at the right time
3. Reducing the number of child deaths
4. Making the NHS a better place for infants, children and young people
Scotland will be one of the healthiest places in the world for children to grow up in with equitable access to resources, and communities that value and promote both physical and mental wellbeing. This is the RCPCH vision for child health in Scotland.

From conception onwards, a child’s early life circumstances and experiences shape their social, mental and physical development. It is vital that everything in our power is done to protect and promote the health and well-being of our infants, children and young people.

Scotland has much to be proud of in terms of improving outcomes for infants, children and young people: Getting It Right for Every Child, the cornerstone of child health policies, the excellent Patient Safety Programme, leading the way in innovative care and the Children and Young People’s Act that provides every child with a named person. However, there is still much to be done.

Vision 2016: Securing better health outcomes for Scotland’s infants, children and young people sets out what we as child health professionals believe should be done to make child health in Scotland comparable the best in the world. This includes the need for a child health strategy which cuts across all Government departments with a clear remit to reducing child health inequalities.

The Scottish 2016 elections are an opportunity for politicians to be bold and introduce policies to realise our joint ambition, to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up in 2016 and beyond.

Dr Peter Fowlie
Scottish Officer Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
4 ways you can help us improve child health outcomes

1. **Tackle child health inequalities**

Inequality in society is a barrier to the right of every child to good health. More than 210,000 of Scotland’s children live in poverty. These children are more likely to have negative health outcomes, to be born with low birth weight or fail to thrive and be exposed to risks that perpetuate ill health such as poor diet, lack of physical activity, parental drug or alcohol misuse and being in care. Looked-after children are more likely to experience deprivation and poverty with an increased risk of emotional and mental health problems. The needs of looked-after children and young people vary, but are often complex, and can be met only by a range of services operating collaboratively across different settings.

**Recommendations**

1. Develop a coherent national strategy for looked-after children and those at risk of becoming looked after with shared assessment systems, robust documentation and a care pathway

2. Support parents and families through targeted programmes such as the Family Nurse Partnerships and Psychology of Positive Parenting groups and educate about the dangers of alcohol use in pregnancy and the irreversible impact of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorders

3. Ensure financial inclusion services are available to families in need

4. Commission high quality research dedicated to interventions to reduce health inequalities
Worryingly, 28% of Scottish children are overweight or obese, storing up serious health problems for the future. 1 in 10 children starting school have social, emotional or behavioural difficulties and as many as 5 children in every class have additional support needs, all of which puts pressure on other services. Parents and families need support to make better life choices for themselves and their children.

Prevention and early intervention for children’s mental and physical health are crucial if we are to prevent the serious results of illness. This approach means children enjoy better health and well-being now and grow up to be more resilient adults. In turn this can contribute to reduced pressure not only on the health service but all public service provision that children and their families use.

**Recommendations**

1. Encourage physical activity for all children and young people – with or without disabilities, and support parents and families to adopt healthy lifestyles by improving social and physical environments

2. Increase the proportion of the NHS budget dedicated to child and adolescent mental health services

3. Ensure local authority planning decisions include a public health impact assessment

4. Encourage local authorities to introduce 20mph speed limits in built up areas to create safer environments for children to walk, cycle and play
Each year between 350 and 450 infants, children and young people die in Scotland. The majority of these deaths occur in children under one year of age, preterm birth and low birth weight are crucial risk factors for premature death during infancy. The second largest number of deaths occurs in the 15 - 18 year old age group and is often the result of alcohol abuse or road traffic accidents.

Poverty and inequalities play a pivotal role in these deaths and they are highly preventable with the right policy interventions.

Recommendations

1. Implement a robust, consistent child death review system for Scotland.
2. Restrict access to alcohol by children and young people and introduce minimum pricing.
3. Ensure equitable access to the family nurse partnership scheme throughout Scotland.
4. Introduce Graduated Licensing Schemes for novice drivers of all ages.
Integration of care around the needs of infants, children, young people and their families is fundamental to improving their health outcomes. It also reduces duplication and waste and saves significant sums of public money that can be better spent on service improvement.

Children need to see the right professional at the right place at the right time and these professionals must have the knowledge and skills to treat children appropriately. Health services need to ensure they are responsive to the varying needs of looked-after children and young people, disabled children, and other vulnerable groups.

**Recommendations**

1. When providing care and treatment for children and young people, ensure there is parity of esteem between physical and mental health needs.

2. Ensure children, young people and their families are effectively engaged in all matters relating to their health and wellbeing including the design of services.

3. Support and implement the RCPCH Facing the Future: Standards for Acute General Paediatric Services and Facing the Future: Together for Child Health standards to improve hospital based care for children, reduce unnecessary emergency hospital attendances and increase care in the community provision. This includes developing new models of care and ensuring the right number of paediatricians and child health professionals are in the right place at the right time.

4. Ensure protected time for NHS clinicians to contribute to and support child health research and consider the development of a “Child Health Research Centre” for Scotland.
About the RCPCH

The College is a UK organisation which comprises over 16,500 members who live in the UK, Ireland and abroad and plays a major role in advocacy, policy development, postgraduate medical education, as well as in supporting the maintenance of professional standards for its members.

The College’s responsibilities include:

• advocating for children and young people in the UK and abroad
• setting syllabuses for postgraduate training in paediatrics
• overseeing postgraduate training in paediatrics and developing joint training/educational online programmes with other professional bodies
• running postgraduate examinations in paediatrics in the UK and abroad
• organising courses and conferences on children’s health and wellbeing
• issuing guidance on children’s health and wellbeing
• conducting high quality research on children’s health and wellbeing
• developing policy messages and recommendations to promote better child health outcomes
• advising on service and workforce delivery models to ensure better treatment and care for children and young people.

Contact us

RCPCH works with politicians and policymakers in Westminster, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We are the first port of call for enquiries on child health and can provide briefings on request.

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