

Dear Health and Social Care Committee,

We were thrilled to learn about the launch of your major new inquiry into prevention. As Directors of the five A Better Start Partnerships, we would like to build the case for the focus of the inquiry to include prevention in pregnancy, and for babies and young children.

### **About A Better Start and prevention**

A Better Start is the ten-year (2015-2025), £215 million programme set-up by [The National Lottery Community Fund](#), the largest funder of community activity in the UK. The five A Better Start partnerships based in Blackpool, Bradford, Lambeth, Nottingham, and Southend are supporting families to give their babies and very young children the best possible start in life. A Better Start **aims to improve the way that organisations work together and with families to shift attitudes and spending towards preventing problems that can start in early life**. Learning and evidence from A Better Start informs local and national policy and practice initiatives addressing early childhood development.

One of the key goals of A Better Start is to **shift resources towards prevention**. This necessitates a change in culture and spending towards preventative services and models of working, with a commitment to evidence and need-informed service development. While investment in services now may create savings later on, ultimately a focus on prevention will reduce the need for a child or family to access more intensive intervention later in life. These benefits are not immediate and those involved in prevention work can often become disheartened along the journey.

The partnerships place great significance in approaches that are able to undertake earlier identification of pre-cursors that impact healthy childhood development, this includes poverty, domestic abuse, adverse parental mental health and support the development of resilience.

### **Why the Health and Social Care Committee should consider this issue as part of its Prevention inquiry**

What happens in pregnancy and the first five years of life has a significant impact on immediate and later outcomes in adult life. Prevention must include a focus in this area to maximise the chances of improving outcomes across the life course. Early childhood development is critical period and preventative interventions and approaches have a vital role to play. Intervening early can also contribute to significant cost savings across a range of areas including health and education.

It is an absolutely crucial time to focus on this area, as families have continued to face the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis. Inequalities have increased the gap between the most marginalised in society and those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Family support services have faced significant cuts to funding despite ever increasing need. This makes it a vital moment for the Committee to look into this issue now; as it is a unique period in history, and we are unlikely to understand the full impact for some time.

Priorities for ABS directors are:

- Ensuring a clear understanding and definition of prevention which encompasses pregnancy and early years;
- Joined up working across public health commissioned services, primary care, the voluntary sector and local communities;
- Ensuring ringfenced funding and resources are available to focus on prevention and public health services especially in areas of widening inequalities.

We would be thrilled to provide further evidence and data to the Prevention inquiry should you decide to pursue a focus in this area. We have implemented a vast range of preventative services and approaches which we would be thrilled to share the learning of. For example:

- Lambeth Early Action Partnership (LEAP) implemented a Midwifery Continuity of Care (MCoC) team to enable pregnant people to be supported by a consistent midwife.
- Better Start Bradford delivered the Talking Together programme, which targets early language development.
- Better Start Southend Perinatal and Infant Mental Health service addresses the mental health needs of women and their families in the perinatal stage, with a particular focus on the early intervention and promotion of positive mental health and the promotion of positive relationships between parents and their infants.
- Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) Nottingham have targeted inequalities experienced by families from minority ethnic backgrounds leading to positive outcomes.
- Blackpool Better Start have implemented a number of approaches to target the impact of poverty on family life, including establishing a Community Connector team to establish and maintain relationships with families.

Yours faithfully,

Alex Spragg, Director, Better Start Bradford  
Clare Law, Director, Blackpool Better Start  
Karla Capstick, Director, Small Steps Big Changes (Nottingham)  
Laura McFarlane, Director, Lambeth Early Action Partnership (LEAP)  
Tara Poore, Director, A Better Start Southend