



Inquiry into the Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People

6 December 2021

About Children in Scotland

Giving all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish is at the heart of everything we do.

By bringing together a network of people working with and for children, alongside children and young people themselves, we offer a broad, balanced and independent voice. We create solutions, provide support and develop positive change across all areas affecting children in Scotland.

We do this by listening, gathering evidence, and applying and sharing our learning, while always working to uphold children's rights. Our range of knowledge and expertise means we can provide trusted support on issues as diverse as the people we work with and the varied lives of children and families in Scotland.

Children in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence and highlight the opportunities decision-makers have to address key issues affecting the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Questions

What are the key issues around health and wellbeing for children and young people in Scotland?

More than ten years ago, the Marmot Review outlined the significant link between poverty and health outcomes and made the case that improving health and wellbeing required concerted action to reduce poverty.¹ Health inequalities continue to persist in Scotland, and we would encourage the Committee to read the State of Child Health reports from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, which set out current evidence on child health outcomes and data trends

¹ <https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review/fair-society-healthy-lives-full-report-pdf.pdf>

across the UK. This shows an increase in levels of childhood obesity and youth suicide.²

Children in Scotland is a member of the End Child Poverty Coalition Scotland (ECP), which recently submitted a response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026. This response stressed the vital and immediate need to provide financial support to families to raise them out of poverty and remove the mental health strain associated with living in poverty. We, along with other ECP members welcomed the recent announcement that a doubling of the Scottish Child Payment to £20 per child per week would be introduced from April 2022. However, we know from evidence provided by the Fraser of Allander institute that this alone will not be sufficient to meet the Scottish Government's child poverty targets³. Further action necessary to tackle poverty includes increasing access to holistic family support and setting out a child poverty focused labour-market policy.

Alongside action to address the social determinants of health, is a requirement to improve access to early support. The Christie Report made the case for a significant shift towards investment in early intervention ten years ago, but in 2021, this goal remains unrealised⁴.

Children and young people who are referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) continue to experience lengthy waiting times to access support,⁵ whilst demand for support has been on the rise for several years.⁶ Some young people experience greater difficulties when trying to access help: one of our member organisations which works with LGBT young people informed us that CAMHS often send referrals back to them, meaning that these young people are not getting support with their mental health.⁷

We firmly believe that mental health and wellbeing policy must have a greater focus on early intervention and prevention so that problems do not deteriorate to the extent that access to CAMHS is required. We welcome the development of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Delivery Board, but believe it remains too medicalised in its approach and not focused enough of the needs and preferences of children and young people. Additional measures should include:

- Targeted support for groups at risk of poorer mental health
- Wider, year-round access to mental health-improving universal opportunities such as sport, youth work, play and the arts
- Perinatal mental health/family support

² <https://stateofchildhealth.rcpch.ac.uk/>.

³ <https://fraserofallander.org/mission-not-impossible-how-ambitious-are-the-scottish-governments-child-poverty-targets/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/commission-future-delivery-public-services/>

⁵ <https://www.publichealthscotland.scot/publications/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-camhs-waiting-times/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-camhs-waiting-times-quarter-ending-30-june-2021>

⁶ Audit Scotland, *Children and young people's mental health* (2018), https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2018/nr_180913_mental_health.pdf.

⁷ <https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/23-06-21-Voices-Forum-briefing.pdf>.

- Counselling, peer support and other talking therapies.⁸

This focus must be supported with adequate funding so that children and young people benefit from these policies.

We know from our direct work with children and young people that mental health is an extremely important issue for them. Our children and young people's advisory group, Changing our World, has informed us that the lack of support and length of waiting times are key areas of concern for them and that they will be campaigning on this issue.

Covid-19 has had and continues to have a profound impact on the health and wellbeing on children and young people, such as increased social isolation, the severe disruption to education and reduced employment opportunities. The Mental Health Foundation has helpfully summarised much of the evidence relating to the mental health impact of the pandemic⁹. Consideration of how the pandemic has affected different groups of children and young people is absolutely crucial, as is a broader understanding of the different health and wellbeing needs across different populations of children and young people, including those with disabilities and long-term conditions, LGBTQI young people, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds and those who are care experienced.

The Promise demonstrates that the care system in Scotland can in certain situations act in a way that impedes important relationships that are significant for young people's wellbeing.¹⁰ We would like to highlight the extensive work of Who Cares? Scotland in campaigning and advocating on issues of importance to care experienced young people in Scotland.¹¹ The Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (Staf) has highlighted how "the severe inequalities faced by young people with care experience who are more likely to experience poverty, homelessness, ill health, poor educational attainment and unemployment" have been worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic,¹² making this a key issue for the inquiry.

What are the current challenges with improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people over the next 5 years

Children in Scotland chairs the Children's Sector Strategic Forum, which exists to bring senior members of the children's sector together on areas of common

⁸ Children in Scotland, *Manifesto for 2021-26*, accessed at https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Manifesto_V2.1_March-21.pdf.

⁹ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/MHF%20Scotland%20Impacts%20of%20Lockdown.pdf>

¹⁰ https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Promise_v7.pdf.

¹¹ In WC?S' Annual Participation Programme 21/21, care experienced parents selected several policy areas health and wellbeing they think should be improved, see <https://www.whocarescotland.org/annual-participation-programme-21-22/>.

¹² <https://www.staf.scot/news/response-to-programme-for-government-21-22>.

concern, including child poverty, mental health and outcomes budgeting.¹³ A key goal of the forum is to ensure that Scottish Government policy is joined up, in recognition of the often siloed approach to policy making in Scotland. Given the evidence outlined above it is absolutely essential that the Scottish Government develops a more integrated approach to policymaking that considers the impact of poverty on health and wellbeing.

The increasing rate of child poverty in Scotland is a serious issue in relation to improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Without immediate action, experts predict that the Scottish Government will not achieve its own interim targets of reducing rates to 18% in 2023/4.^{14 15}

The impact of Covid-19 will continue to affect people, especially the most vulnerable in society. However, many of the problems identified during the pandemic have their origins before COVID-19. Children and young people continue to experience physical health challenges, and the rates of childhood obesity in Scotland for example continue to be a matter of concern.¹⁶

We have seen through our own research the impact people's area of residence can have on their health and wellbeing. Our Health Inequalities project worked with youth peer researchers to look at the impact of where they lived on the choices they could make about their health and wellbeing. The researchers had strong views (both positive and negative) about how safety, littering and family and friends in their community could affect their health and wellbeing and identified a number of key barriers that prevent children and young people from making the most of their communities, such as lack of access to green space and limited food options. They also found that feeling unsafe in an area prevented people from accessing community resources.¹⁷

What offers the best opportunity for improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people over the next 5 years

Budget opportunities

It is now well-established that an economic model that emphasises growth which increases income inequalities across society is not compatible with wellbeing.¹⁸ To improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people will require fiscal

¹³ An example of observations by frontline third-sector workers can be found here: <https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/DRAFT-CSSPF-Minutes-30-April-2020.pdf>.

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/poverty-and-social-justice/child-poverty/>.

¹⁵ <https://fraserofallander.org/mission-not-impossible-how-ambitious-are-the-scottish-governments-child-poverty-targets/>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-health-survey-2018-volume-1-main-report/pages/62/>.

¹⁷ Children in Scotland, *Health Inequalities: peer research into the role of communities* (January 2020), report found at <https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Health-Inequalities-Report-Chris-Ross.pdf>.

¹⁸ Wilkinson R & Pickett K (2010) *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*. Penguin Books

decisions that prioritise wellbeing over growth. In the context of COVID-19, the priority should be on renewal and change, not a reflex recovery and return to the previous status quo.¹⁹ Each annual budget brings an opportunity for the government to refocus its approaches to planning and make spending decisions based on what will tangibly improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

We welcome the Scottish Government's current work to develop a series of children and young people's outcomes to sit underneath the national outcomes in the National Performance Framework. We would encourage the committee to explore the potential to use these outcomes once finalised as a basis for framing the planning process for the 2022-3 budget. We draw the committee's attention to Children in Scotland, Carnegie Trust UK and Cattanach's Being Bold report, which presents the framework for a children's wellbeing budget for Scotland.²⁰

Legislative opportunities

The incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scottish law is a valuable opportunity to improve legislation, policy and practice in areas that affect children and young people's health and wellbeing. We are urging the Scottish Government to act on its commitment to incorporation²¹ and encourage the committee to take on a children's rights approach to all its work, looking at how its business can act to further the human rights of all children.

Opportunities in health and wellbeing policy

Children in Scotland's manifesto for 2021-2026 and its calls were created in collaboration with our numerous members who work directly with children and families.²² Together we are calling for the following policies aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of all children and young people in Scotland:

- Investing in mental health prevention and early intervention for children and young people to stop problems deteriorating to the extent they require specialist CAMHS services. This must include:
 - o Targeted support for groups at risk of poorer mental health
 - o Wider, year-round access to mental health-improving universal opportunities such as sport, youth work, play and the arts
 - o Perinatal mental health/family support
 - o Counselling, peer support and other talking therapies.

- Publishing a series of rights-based wellbeing outcomes and indicators for children, young people and families to give future direction to policy action to improve the health and wellbeing of children, young people and families living in Scotland.

¹⁹ CiS Manifesto n 9.

²⁰ <https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BeingBold-Report.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.gov.scot/news/pledge-on-childrens-rights/>.

²² CiS Manifesto n 9.

- Ensuring that PSE classes provide honest, non-judgemental opportunities to discuss health and wellbeing and are co-designed with children and young people, as called for by our children and young people's advisory group Changing our World

We believe that enhanced and effective family support would also help to support children and young people's health and wellbeing, placing their wellbeing as existing within the context of the families in which they live.

Education

There are several education policies that the committee could explore:

- Making wellbeing the central focus of Scottish education: building on the OECD review of Curriculum for Excellence, the committee could explore the extent to which work to revise Curriculum for Excellence and review current Scottish educational governance (as led by Ken Muir) places children and young people's wellbeing at the centre
- Understanding the important impact of non-formal learning opportunities on wellbeing: the committee could learn from the experience gained in Finland from introducing a "hobby premium" to ensure that all children and young people have free access to a hobby or activity of their choice within or around the school day
- Ensuring that we have a diverse workforce supporting the learning of children and young people: the committee could explore the impact that a comprehensive Youth Work Strategy could have on health and wellbeing, in and out of formal educational settings.

The Promise

The findings in The Promise should be fully implemented by 2030 to transform the lives of young people with experience of care. We know the importance of the right sort of support as young people leave care – housing is a key foundation for this²³ and care leavers represent 6% of the homelessness applications made in Scotland.²⁴ The full implementation of The Promise would make a great difference to the lives of care experienced young people in Scotland and would help address various issues that impact on their health and wellbeing.

²³ Our Home and Belonging project year 2 report shows how belonging and stability in housing impacts on the health and wellbeing of care-experienced young people (not yet published).

²⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2019-2020/pages/5/>.

How does addressing poverty lead to improved health and social care outcomes?

As we have highlighted above, there is excellent evidence available that links poverty to poorer health outcomes. This evidence is well-established and understood internationally and, as such, the case for addressing poverty to improve health outcomes should not need to be restated. Action to reduce poverty in Scotland must be a priority, not only if the Scottish Government is to meet its child poverty targets, but also if it seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of the nation. This would improve a whole host of factors that contribute to health and wellbeing, not least:

- The potential to have improved quality of housing, free from damp and overcrowding
- Greater resources available to purchase healthy food options, known to be more expensive
- Greater opportunity for children to take part in extracurricular pastimes and hobbies that benefit physical and mental health
- Less impact from the worry and stress of living in poverty, which impacts across whole families.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence to the committee on any of the points included in this written submission.

For more information, please contact:

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