



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

# **The Best Start for Life**

## **A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days**

### **The Early Years Healthy Development Review**

24 November 2021

**Positive experiences in the 1,001 critical days are closely associated with better performance at school, social and emotional development, improved work outcomes, higher income and better lifelong health. Late intervention is estimated by the Early Intervention Foundation to cost up to £17 billion a year in England and Wales, placing additional pressure on many services, including acute services, local government, the NHS, welfare, criminal justice and education.**

- **The 1,001 critical days are when the foundations of the brain's architecture are built.** This includes cognitive, emotional and social capabilities, which develop best when a baby forms a secure attachment with their primary caregivers. Stress and adverse experiences during this period have lifelong impacts.
- **Babies who breastfeed** reduce their chance of **childhood obesity** by 13%; children of mothers with **emotional difficulties** are almost up to 3 times more likely to have emotional difficulties themselves; and **reading ability** in later childhood is associated with several early years factors, including parent attachment.
- Life course mental health is strongly tied to early experiences, with evidence suggesting that trajectories of **poor mental health can be identified from as early as six months.**
- **There are stark socioeconomic inequalities across the country.** The proportion of babies reaching the expected level of development at age 2-2.5 is 93% in the least deprived areas and 84% in the most deprived.
- **This gap widens throughout childhood:** for example, at 5 there is a disadvantage gap of eighteen percentage points (55% of disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected level of development vs. 73% of all other pupils).

# The Start for Life Vision

March 2021 – Launch - The Vision is based around 6 action areas and 29 individual actions to tackle the previously outlined challenges and deliver a step change in outcomes for babies and their families.

## THE ACTION AREAS

### Ensuring Families Can Access the Services they Need

1. **Seamless support for families:** a coherent joined up Start for Life offer available to all families.
2. **A welcoming hub for families:** Family Hubs as a place for families to access Start for Life services.
3. **The information families need when they need it:** designing digital, virtual and telephone offers around the needs of the family

### Making the Start for Life System Effective

4. **An empowered Start for Life workforce:** developing a modern skilled workforce to meet the changing needs of families.
5. **Continually improving the Start for Life offer:** improving data, evaluation, outcomes and proportionate inspection.
6. **Leadership for change:** ensuring local and national accountability and building the economic case.



The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report



# What This Means for Parents, Carers, and Babies

At the heart of the Vision is the ambition of improving the experience and outcomes parents, carers and babies.

**The Start for Life workforce** will make families feel comfortable when asking for help because they will understand their needs and have the time to support.

**Digital records** of a baby's health and development will reduce the risk of information loss

**Family hubs** will ensure parents and carers can access joined-up services, getting the help they need when they need it.

**Improving the regulatory framework** will give parents and carers vital assurances about the quality of services.

**Better data access** will make it easier for parents and carers to share information with service providers and advocate for their baby's needs. This will remove the burden of repeating basic information or traumatic experiences to different professionals.

**Local and national, accountable leadership** will provide high-quality, joined up services.

**Publication of a Start for Life Offers** will mean parents and carers know exactly what support they can access.

**A shared outcome framework** will enable parents and carers to compare local authority outcomes as they consider where to raise their family

**Parent and Carer panels** will ensure that the voices of parents and carers inform national and local decisions.



# What do we mean by Start for Life Offer?

The Best Start for Life Review: a [Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days](#) outlines a Vision for local authorities to pull together a coherent and joined up Start for Life offer which explains clearly to parents and carers what services they are entitled to and how they can access them.

This offer is made up of a Universal and Universal+ elements. This Vision describes the ambition for every Universal offer to bring together essential provision for every new family.

**The Universal offer brings together the six core Universal services of:**

- **midwifery**
- **health visiting**
- **mental health support**
- **infant feeding advice with specialist breast feeding support.**
- **safeguarding and those services relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**

Supplementing the Universal offer, the “Universal +” offer meets the relevant needs of local communities, covering a range of services such as: parenting support; early language development; debt and finance support; housing support; smoking cessation services; drug and alcohol support.

# Delivering the Vision

**The Spending Review announced a £500m package for babies, children and families. This included:**

- **£82m for Family Hub**
- **£50m for Parenting Programmes**
- **£10m to support local authorities in developing and publishing their Start for Life offers.**
- **£50m for breastfeeding support**
- **£100m for infant and perinatal mental health.**
- **£10m for workforce pilots.**
- **£200m uplift for the Supporting Families programme.**