

Department of Health and Social Care
By email: nrpfconsultation@dhsc.gov.uk

21/10/2024

Re: British Association of Social Workers Northern Ireland response to the Department of Health and Social Care consultation—*Eligibility for Healthy Start for groups who have no recourse to public funds or are subject to immigration controls*

Dear Colleague

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

The British Association of Social Workers Northern Ireland (BASW NI) is part of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), the largest professional body for social workers in the UK. The Association has 22,000 members employed in frontline, management, academic and research positions in all care settings.

BASW campaigns to highlight the profoundly negative impact that the legislation, policies and practices of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) have on the most vulnerable in our society. No individual or family should be destitute, or near destitution, as a result of NRPF and as detailed in BASW's [Practice Guidance on NRPF](#), the legislation, policies and application of NRPF to those who are destitute, or who are faced with destitution, result in breaches of human rights law.

Social workers play a key role in supporting people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom, with members of BASW NI increasingly assisting asylum seeking families and unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Northern Ireland.

BASW NI agrees with the proposal that eligibility for Healthy Start should be extended to non-British children under 4 from families with NRPF or who are subject to immigration controls. The Association also agrees that eligibility should be extended to pregnant women with NRPF or who are subject to immigration controls, and mothers with NRPF or who are subject to immigration controls with children under one.

The consultation asks whether there are benefits to adding the aforementioned groups to the eligibility criteria for the Healthy Start scheme. There will be clear benefits to the mothers and children affected, who will gain improved access to the nutritious food and milk, and vitamin supplements, that are critical to healthy development and which those affected would be likely to otherwise go without.

A failure to provide this support will also lead to avoidable health impacts. This in turn will create greater costs for the health service given [NHS treatment is not classed as a public fund for immigration purposes](#) and can be accessed by a person regardless of their immigration status. A similar 'cost shunt' exists for social services in meeting need created because of a lack of central government support to people with NRPF.

In light of the spiralling cost of living, with the rate of food inflation peaking at [19.2% in March 2023](#), BASW NI is of the view that the level of support provided by the Healthy Start scheme should be uplifted in line with inflation, taking as a baseline the £4.25 payment introduced in April 2021.

While the proposed changes are welcome, BASW NI calls for a comprehensive independent review of the model of NRPF in relation to those who are destitute, or who face destitution, with a view to the Government replacing the model with a system that is both adequately funded and resourced and is compliant with the UK's commitments to human rights.

If you require any further information, please contact BASW NI Public Affairs, Policy and Communications Lead, Andy McClenaghan at andy.mcclenaghan@basw.co.uk.

Yours faithfully



CAROLYN EWART
National Director, BASW NI