





Britain is at a fork in the road. This must now be a moment to think again about the country that we want to be.

We can either go back to the same insecure and unequal economy that's been so cruelly exposed by the virus. Or we can seize this moment, and go forward to a future that builds a more secure and prosperous economy.

This consultation, alongside the Policy Review led by our Party Chair Anneliese Dodds, presents us with an opportunity to set out a bold vision for a brighter future as we emerge from the pandemic.

This is a chance for us to address what matters most to people, and the eight consultation documents reflect this. From ensuring children are at the heart of our recovery from Covid-19, to making the green new deal work for all; from repairing the foundations of our economy, to ending violence against women and girls, this consultation is an opportunity for us to work out what it takes to make Britain the best place to grow up and grow old in.

Throughout the consultation there will be a number of online member events so that my colleagues in the Shadow Cabinet can directly hear your views on the eight consultation topics, and I encourage you to get involved. Whether you submit your views at an event or through Labour Policy Forum, whether as an individual or as part of a group, I look forward to hearing your insights. By connecting all parts of our Party in this discussion, together we can build a brighter future post-pandemic.

**Keir Starmer**  
**Leader of the Labour Party**

Thank you for your involvement in the Labour Party's 2021 National Policy Forum (NPF) Consultation. Through this consultation we want to listen to our members, supporters and stakeholders on how the next Labour government can make the UK the best place to grow up, grow old and live in.

This paper is one of eight policy documents published by the Labour Party as part of the consultation this year. Each document will look at the current situation in the UK and the policy challenges we face, followed by a set of questions on the way forward. There is no need to answer every one of these questions, nor is there a specific way in which to answer them. We suggest using the questions to stimulate your thoughts on what you think the main issues are in the document's policy area.

You can write your response as an individual, or as a collective through your local party or organisation. Once you have drafted your response, please submit it to us through Labour Policy Forum: [www.policyforum.labour.org.uk](http://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk). For more information on how to make a submission, see **[www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/consultation-submission-guide](http://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/consultation-submission-guide)**.

On the website you can also find out more ways to get involved with the consultation, including full information on our programme of member e-roundtable events. You can also read the seven other consultation documents which might be of interest to you as well. While we are primarily asking for policy ideas related to the eight consultation topics this year, if you have an idea or issue on another topic please do submit this on the website too.

We look forward to hearing your policy ideas on how we can make Britain the best place to grow up, grow old and live in.

## Want to know more about how Labour makes its policy?

You can learn more about the Labour Party's policy making process on our Resource Hub **[www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/resource-hub](http://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/resource-hub)**.

You can also follow us on Twitter **[@labpolicyforum](https://twitter.com/labpolicyforum)** for all of the latest policy development news and events.

## Accessible Materials

The Labour Party is an inclusive member-based organisation that prides itself on being accessible to all who share its values. If you would like an accessible version of these documents, please email us at **[policydevelopment@labour.org.uk](mailto:policydevelopment@labour.org.uk)** to discuss how we can best accommodate your requirements.

# Tackling health inequalities to make the country the best place to grow up and old in

Now, over a year since the coronavirus pandemic hit our country and we entered the first lockdown, it is right to take stock of the health of the nation and reflect on our priorities as we look to rebuild.

Throughout the pandemic, we have witnessed the strength of our local communities, who have pulled together to support each other through these challenging times.

We have seen the dedication of our social care workforce who have made great personal sacrifices to continue to look after our older and most vulnerable members of society throughout the pandemic, putting themselves at risk to do so. And we have seen the best of our NHS workers who put their lives at risk to serve others on the frontline and have worked tirelessly to deliver the vaccine that is providing much needed hope for us all.

But while the coronavirus crisis has shown the best of Britain, it has exposed our fragilities, too. The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the challenges in our health and care system – results of a decade of underfunding, understaffing and neglect of social care. And it has brutally exposed the stark health inequalities that persist in our country.

Since the first few months of the pandemic, evidence has emerged showing that people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities were suffering disproportionately from the impacts of the virus, being more likely to be hospitalised and tragically, to die. And striking differences in the impact of coronavirus on those in more disadvantaged areas have also been highlighted – with people in more disadvantaged areas experiencing higher death rates and being more exposed to the virus.

The Labour commissioned Doreen Lawrence Review *An Avoidable Crisis* examined the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities – concluding that Black, Asian and minority ethnic people have been overexposed to the virus, under protected, and overlooked. Decades of structural injustices, inequality and discrimination led to this avoidable crisis.

Throughout the pandemic, Labour has demanded a clear plan to address the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus pandemic on certain groups, including people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, and those living in more disadvantaged areas of the country. We have spoken out against the Government's failure to take sufficient steps to protect these groups.

The pandemic has brought the devastating impact of health inequalities to the fore. But when it comes to the impact of inequalities in our society, the tragic outcome of the pandemic is only the tip of the iceberg.

People living in poorer areas are far less likely to enjoy a long and healthy life. A child growing up in poverty is more likely to suffer ill health, more likely to develop health problems in later life, and more likely to die earlier than their more affluent peers.

It is completely unacceptable that people from different backgrounds, or living in different parts of our country have such different chances of living in good health – from birth through to older age.

The Labour Party will do everything it can do to tackle the inequalities that persist, and which alarmingly, have widened under a decade of Conservative leadership. This consultation explores the steps that must be taken to realise Labour's ambition for a brighter, more secure and healthier future for everyone in the country.

## The challenges

The coronavirus pandemic has shone a spotlight on health inequalities and highlighted the tragic human cost of the Government's failure to address them.

As we look ahead to steps that must now be taken to build a better future, the scale of the challenges we face must not be underestimated.

Rates of premature deaths, including those linked to heart disease and lung cancer, are two times higher in the most deprived areas of England compared to the most affluent. Suicide rates are greater in the most deprived areas, and we see higher rates of addictions and drug overdose deaths too. Children and adults living in poverty are up to three times more likely to develop mental health problems compared to people from the highest income brackets.

Sir Michael Marmot's valuable work on health inequalities, including *The Marmot Review 10 Years On*, shows a shocking decline in the nation's health under years of Conservative rule from 2010 to 2020.

A decade of austerity saw widespread reductions in public spending. Social, economic and regional inequalities deepened during this time. Child poverty increased and now over 4 million children live in poverty. Health inequalities have widened. Overall population health has declined, and for the first time in a century, life expectancy has stalled.

This deterioration in the nation's health and worsening inequalities would be a shameful record for any government, and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic is expected to further worsen existing inequalities.

While everyone has sacrificed during the pandemic, it has hit the most disadvantaged parts of our society the hardest.

While some have been able to work from home and may have seen their income increase, others have faced no choice but to work on the frontline or lose their job. Others, without adequate sick pay, have been faced with the impossible choice of doing the right thing and self-isolating or being able to put food on the table. We have seen the worst economic crisis of any major economy, suffered large-scale redundancies, and many people still face an uncertain future in their jobs.

The effects of the lockdown and school closures on our children are also a great concern. There have been worrying declines in children's mental health. And we know how important early childhood support and education is to help level up children's life chances. With a year of disrupted education and rising child poverty, the government risks failing a generation.

## The way forward

As we emerge from this crisis – the worst health crisis in memory and worst economic crisis of any major economy – we are clear that we must not return to business as usual.

As we rebuild, Labour will be bold and ambitious.

Our vision is clear: we want to make this country the best place to grow up in and the best place to grow old in. Labour is committed to ensuring that everyone, regardless of their background, ethnicity, income, or where they live, has the same chance to enjoy a long and healthy life. It is a fundamental human right.

To make the country the best place to grow up and old in for everyone, we must take decisive action to tackle the root causes of inequalities in the nation's health. We must address the inequalities and injustices that the coronavirus pandemic has so brutally exposed.

This means that as we recover from the pandemic it will be essential to focus not just on restoring our NHS to the highest standards of care, tackling spiralling waiting lists for NHS treatment, and fixing our broken social care system. It's not enough just to fix these problems that have worsened under a decade of Conservative leadership and have further deteriorated during the pandemic.

After the sacrifices everyone has made throughout the pandemic, and the suffering people have endured, the people of this country deserve a better, more secure and healthier future.

Bold action is needed to tackle the wider determinants of health and put prevention at the heart of our public services.

This requires a recognition that the nation's health cannot be viewed in isolation from the rest of society. Our NHS is amazing but cannot alone prevent ill health, nor reduce health inequalities.

For genuine change, a cross-governmental and societal approach is needed. We need a government that demands better.

We need action to tackle poverty and improve life chances for everyone. We need to rebuild our economy and ensure access to decent, secure jobs. We need to invest in our children and ensure our elderly are supported to stay healthy and receive the care they need. And we need to empower people to feel they have a say over their own lives.

Labour is committed to delivering a better future for everyone. We must now move forward with the ambition and determination to guarantee a better future for everyone in the country.

## Questions:

1. What lessons can we learn about health inequalities from the experience of the coronavirus pandemic?
2. What are the greatest challenges we face in tackling health inequalities?
3. What policy action is needed to address health inequalities in our country?
4. What steps must be taken to ensure a cross-governmental, and societal approach to tackling inequalities?
5. How can we realign public services to focus on the prevention of ill health in the first place?