



The BMJ

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2020;371:m4134

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m4134>

Published: 26 October 2020

Covid-19: Tackling health inequalities is more urgent than ever, says new alliance

Abi Rimmer

The covid-19 pandemic has exposed how health inequalities can affect people not just over a lifetime but in a matter of weeks, a new coalition of 79 health and social care organisations has said.

The Inequalities in Health Alliance, brought together by the Royal College of Physicians, has written to the prime minister to call for action.

Michael Marmot, director of University College London's Institute of Health Equity and the author of several key reviews looking at health inequalities, has praised the group's efforts. He said, "The pandemic has exposed and amplified underlying inequalities in society. Health inequalities are the result. Tackling the social causes of health inequalities is even more urgent now."

The alliance has asked the UK government to do three things: develop a cross government strategy to reduce health inequalities, enforce the socioeconomic duty placed on government bodies by section 1 of the Equality Act 2010, and adopt a "child health in all policies" approach.

In its letter to Boris Johnson the alliance said that a cross-government strategy was needed because health inequality was the result of many and varied factors. "All parts of government and public services need to adopt reducing health inequality as a priority," it said.

The socioeconomic duty was also key to ensure that the needs of vulnerable people were considered in every decision, the alliance said. "This gives us the best chance at avoiding unintended consequences falling disproportionately on the most disadvantaged."

The covid-19 pandemic had served to highlight the important role that a child's health had in their outcomes as an adult. "For example, we have seen all too clearly that by allowing more and more children to become obese in the past we increased their risk of dying from covid-19 in the present," the alliance said. "We need to be prepared for future pandemics, and make sure all public policy is focused on making sure every child has the best chance of good health throughout their life."

Commenting on the alliance's aims, Andrew Goddard, president of the Royal College of Physicians, said that a focus on health inequalities could tackle covid-19 in the short term and help to reduce its effects on the UK's health and prosperity in the longer term.

"That such a large number and wide range of organisations should come together to form the Health Inequalities Alliance is a powerful statement that now is the perfect time to reduce the gap in healthy life expectancy by taking the right steps to reset the NHS, make social care sustainable, and reinvigorate our approach to public health," he said.

A full list of members of the Inequalities in Health Alliance can be seen at <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/file/25781/download>.

This article is made freely available for use in accordance with BMJ's website terms and conditions for the duration of the covid-19 pandemic or until otherwise determined by BMJ. You may use, download and print the article for any lawful, non-commercial purpose (including text and data mining) provided that all copyright notices and trade marks are retained.