

Letter from the UK Malnutrition Awareness and Prevention Network partner organisations:

University of Hertfordshire UH

NIHR | Applied Research Collaboration
East of England

BDA The Association
of UK Dietitians

NACC
National Association of Care Catering

sustain
the alliance for better food and farming

BU
Bournemouth
University

ndr
nutrition & diet resources

**Salford
ageUK**

LILS London
Independent Living Service
Supporting your independence

HILS Hertfordshire
Independent Living Service
Supporting your independence

Food Train
supporting older people

Food Train
EAT WELL AGE WELL

29th June 2020

ADDRESSEE:

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

CC:

England -

Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs,
Dr Alison Tedstone, National Director with responsibility of diet, nutrition and obesity, Public Health
England

Northern Ireland -

Mr Robin Swann MLA, Minister of Health
Mr Edwin Poots MLA, Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Scotland -

Ms Jeane Freeman MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport
Mr Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism
Mr Joe Fitzpatrick, MSP and Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing
Ms Christina McKelvie, Minister for Older People and Equalities

Wales -

Mr Vaughan Gething MS, Minister for Health and Social Services

Ms Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs

Reply to:

Professor Wendy Wills

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Dear Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Government action is urgently required to prevent malnutrition amongst older adults due to COVID-19.

It has been estimated that malnutrition affected over 3 million people in the UK, pre-COVID. Of this group about 1.3 million are over the age of 65, representing one in ten of that population. Since the beginning of the pandemic, it has been reported that **nearly five million adults** are experiencing food insecurity¹. COVID-19 has significantly impacted nutritional health and increased the risk of malnutrition among vulnerable communities in the UK, including many **older adults and those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds**. We are calling on your departments, which have overall responsibility for health, care and food policy, to work with all arms of government to take urgent action to address these issues.

Whilst we have moved beyond the initial peak of the pandemic, subsequent rises in rates of infection alongside ongoing social distancing measures and shielding recommendations will continue to affect normal means of accessing food and significantly increase risk of malnutrition. These risks will be exacerbated as we move towards the 'flu season this winter and are likely to increase at-risk groups' vulnerability to both malnutrition and COVID-19, particularly as social isolation and loneliness can often be significant underlying social causes of malnutrition. ***The impact of the pandemic is creating a perfect storm for an increase in malnutrition in the UK.***

Most people who are malnourished live at home, in their community, and raising awareness of the risk of malnutrition among these households and the people who care for them is vitally important now and in the coming months. Malnutrition and undernutrition impact on the immune systems of people affected and will increase their vulnerability to the effects of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. **Malnutrition impacts on frailty through muscle wasting and cognitive impairment, leading to an increased risk of falls and an inability to go about typical daily tasks such as buying or preparing food.** A parallel risk of anxiety and depression is also a concern.

¹ <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/new-food-foundation-data-food-insecurity-and-debt-are-the-new-reality-under-lockdown/>

Organisations supporting older and more vulnerable people and helping with the emergency food response report that **too many 'new' individuals have become vulnerable** to malnutrition during the pandemic and urgently require ongoing assistance. Food banks, sadly, continue to play a significant and increasing role in filling the gap left by the failings of our welfare system, despite the government's increases in the value of Universal Credit. Many people will be unable to cook healthy meals even if they can access food, due to a lack of equipment, facilities, capacity or fuel.

Individuals recovering from COVID-19 will have additional nutritional needs as a result of being ventilated or inactive for long periods.

Difficulties in detecting community cases of malnutrition are also now exacerbated by the move to health services operating remotely rather than through face to face appointments and visits. Community dietetic services, despite best efforts, are not running 'business as usual' because of redeployment to assist acute services, social distancing measures and inadequate access to technology and other resources. This means that individuals who urgently require dietetic support at home are considerably less likely to be referred or to fully access these services.

In the longer term, it is vitally important to prioritise upstream prevention and community capacity building to support eating for health, and to tackle food insecurity. ***Please take steps to eradicate food insecurity.***

We, the undersigned, are calling for your government to:

- Ensure that local authorities have **ringfenced additional funding** to continue with high quality food provision for people who may need to shield or self-isolate in future, with suitable advice from dietitians.
- Ensure that local authorities have funding to establish long-term sustainable solutions to malnutrition amongst over 65s, including **meals on wheels services**.
- Ensure that funding and support is made available for **vital NHS dietetic services** and third sector nutrition and food services, both during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond it.
- Fund a campaign to raise **awareness** of the importance of good nutrition for at risk groups and their carers.
- Invest in proactive case-finding in order to locate and help individuals at risk and an upstream, **prevention-based approach** to prevent people becoming food insecure in the first place.
- **Prioritise nutrition** as part of NHS rehab pathways and support community malnutrition services to return as quickly as possible, albeit exploiting new technological solutions as much as possible.
- Urgently introduce a **legally enshrined** "Right to Food", as laid out within the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the UK, to ensure that governments at both a national and local level take appropriate action.

This government has repeatedly stated it wishes to prioritise the prevention of ill health and to create a more resilient and dynamic UK economy. Taking action to ensure that all population groups receive the support they need to eat well should be priority actions so that the government delivers on these aims. We would welcome a response to our call for action.

Yours sincerely

Signed by the following:

The UK Malnutrition Awareness and Prevention Network partner organisations:

University of Hertfordshire: Professor Wendy Wills, Professor of Food and Public Health; Director, Centre for Research in Public Health and Community Care (CRIPACC) and NIHR ARC East of England Prevention & Early Detection in Health and Social Care theme lead; Dr Angela Dickinson, Senior Research Fellow in Older People's Health; Jane McClinchy, Principal Lecturer in Nutrition and Dietetics

British Dietetic Association: Caroline Bovey RD BEM, Chair; BDA Older People Specialist Group (BDA-OPSG): Alison Smith RD, Chair

National Association of Care Caterers (NACC): Sue Cawthray, National Chair

Sustain: Morven Oliver-Larkin, Meals on Wheels Campaign Coordinator

Food Train/Eat Well Age Well Scotland (EAWW): Michelle Carruthers, MBE, Chief Executive, The Food Train, Laura Cairns, Project Manager, Tilly Robinson-Miles, Impact and Policy Officer, Danielle Redmond Grey, Digital Communications Officer, Eat Well Age Well

Hertfordshire Independent Living Services (HILS): Sarah Wren, MBE, Chief Executive

Age UK Salford: Emma Rose, Programme Director; Dave Hayes, Chief Executive Officer

Bournemouth University (BU): Jane Murphy, Professor of Nutrition

Nutrition Diet Resources UK (NDR-UK): Linda McPhillie, Chief Executive; Jenni Henderson, Development Officer (Malnutrition Lead)

Senior academic signatories

**additional academic signatures are noted at the end of this letter*

University of Hertfordshire

Jackie Kelly, Dean of the School of Health and Social Work

Professor David Barling, Professor of Food Policy and Security

Professor Natalie Pattison, Florence Nightingale Foundation Clinical Professor of Nursing

Professor Brian Littlechild, Research Lead for Social Work

Professor Hilary Thomas, Emeritus Professor

Professor Jeremy Lewis, Professor of Musculoskeletal Research

Professor Karen Beeton, Head of Department of Allied Health Professions, Midwifery and Social Work

Professor Kathryn Almack, Professor of Health, Young People and Family Lives

Professor Elizabeth Pike, Head of Sport, Health and Exercise

University of Bristol

Professor Eric Herring, Professor of World Politics

City University, London

Professor Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy

University of East Anglia

Professor Ailsa Welch, Professor of Nutritional Epidemiology
Professor Fiona Poland, Professor of Social Research Methodology

University of Edinburgh

Professor Liz Grant, Director Global Health Academy
Professor Mary Brennan, Chair of Food Marketing and Society
Francesca Bray, Emerita Professor of Social Anthropology
Steve Platt, Emeritus Professor of Health Research Policy

Glasgow Caledonian University

Professor John H McKendrick, Co-Director, Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit

Lancaster University

Jennie Popay, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Public Health

University of Leeds

Professor Marion Hetherington, Thomas Ward Endowed Chair in Psychology
Professor John E Blundell, Faculty of Medicine and Health
Professor Andrew J Hill, Professor of Medical Psychology

University of Manchester

Professor John McLaughlin, Professor of Gastroenterology and Nutrition

Manchester Metropolitan University

Carolyn Kagan, Professor Emerita Community Social Psychology

Newcastle University

Professor Thomas Scharf, Professor of Social Gerontology, President, British Society of Gerontology

Northumbria University

Professor Greta Defeyter, Professor in Developmental Psychology

University of Plymouth

Professor Mary Hickson, Professor of Dietetics

University of Reading

Professor Lisa Methven, Professor of Food and Sensory Science

University of Strathclyde

Professor Daniela Sime, Chair in Youth, Migration and Social Justice, Associate Dean (Public Engagement and Impact)

Teesside University

Professor Amelia Lake, Professor of Public Health Nutrition, Associate Director of Fuse, The Centre for Translational Research in Public Health

University of Warwick

Professor Emeritus, Elizabeth Dowler, Retired Public Health Nutritionist

NHS Trust signatories

Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust - Vittoria Romano, Team Lead Dietitian, Nutrition

and Dietetic Services

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust (CPFT) - Joanne McDonald, Dietetics Clinical Manager

James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust - Sue Allen, Lead Renal Dietitian

East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust - Theresa Cole, Professional Lead for Nutrition and Dietetics, Member of BDA

Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust - Bridie Holland, Team Lead Dietitian

Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust - Kirstine Farrer, Consultant Dietitian (Intestinal Failure)

Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust - Julie Kemmner Community Clinical Dietitian and Team Lead, Liz Wardle, Head of Nutrition and Dietetics

West Suffolk Hospital NHS Foundation Trust - Lisa Penfold, Nutrition and Dietetics Professional Lead, Nina O'Brien, Community Lead

Other stakeholder signatories

Aber Food Surplus - Laura Cooper, Community Hub Officer

Anglian Community Enterprise (ACE) Community Interest Company (CiC) - Frank Sims, Chief Executive, Kirsteen Bryson, Clinical Lead (Adult Dietetics), Francesca Howe, Community Dietitian, Karine W Hurst, Specialist Dietitian for Children with Learning Disabilities

Hertfordshire County Council - Tanya Moore, Principal Social Worker

Institute of Health Promotion and Education - Syliva Cheater, MBE, President

Individual signatories

Dr Jennifer M Speirs, Dr Clare England, Dr Keri McCrickerd, Dr Richard W Gray, Isabella Mighetto, Julia Hewitt, Kathryn Edwards, Kathryn Machray, Lourdes Santos Merx, Fiona Bennett, Tamar Wildwing, Valerie Aspin, Jarg Bergold, María Jesús Vega, Samir Sweida-Metwally, Sarah Fakray, Bernardine Farrell, Fariyah Choudhury, Chloe Patel

****Additional academic signatories***

University of Hertfordshire:

Dr Angela Madden, Principal Lecturer in Nutrition and Dietetics, Dr Claire Thompson, Senior Research Fellow, NIHR EoE ARC, Dr Julie Vuolo, Head of Department Nursing, Health and Wellbeing
Dr Neil Howlett, Senior Research Fellow, Dr Rosalind Fallaize, Research Fellow, Dr Samantha Rogers, Senior Research Fellow in Food and Public Health, Karina Vafeiadou, Nutrition Programme Leader
Laurence Blanchard, Lecturer in Nutrition and Dietetics, Simone Roberts, Community Dietitian
Xenofon Tzounis, Lecturer in Nutrition and Dietetics /Specialist Bariatric Dietitian

Aberdeen University

Dr John McKenzie, Research Fellow, Rowett Institute of Health and Nutrition

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Dr Helen Johnson, Principal Lecturer in Psychology

University of Bristol

Dr Catherine Dodds, Senior Lecturer in Public Policy, Dr Elizabeth Haines, Vice-Chancellor's Fellow in History, Dr Keir Williams, Senior Lecturer in Design Thinking, Dr Lauren Blake, Research Associate (agri-food systems), Saima Shah, Subject Lead, Psychology, Bridget Anderson, Professor of Migration, Mobilities and Citizenship, Gene Feder, Professor of Primary Health Care, Lucy Haslam, Research Administrator, Maitri Patel, Student Administrator

Cardiff University

Angelina Sanderson Bellamy, Research Fellow, Sustainable Places Research Institute

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Dr Paul Simpson, Senior Lecturer, Applied Health and Social Care

University of Edinburgh

Dr Aaron Kappeler, Lecturer and Director of the MSc Programme in International Development, Dr Niamh Moore, Senior Lecturer, Sociology, Dr Kirsteen Shields, Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Security, Sonia Bhaskaran, Specialist Community Dietitian, Kaveri Qureshi, Lecturer, Global Health Policy Unit, Valeria Skafida, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy

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Dr Esther K Papias, Senior Lecturer, Matthew Waites, Reader in Sociology, Dr Kate Reid, Health Psychologist and Senior Lecturer, Dr Catherine Lido, Social Psychologist and Senior Lecturer

University of Grenada

Dr David Garcia-Burgos, Marie Sklodowska-Curie Cofund Athenea3i Research Fellow

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Dr Maxine Woolhouse, Senior Lecturer in Psychology

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Dr Charlotte Hardman, Senior Lecturer, Department of Psychology

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Dr Crystal Haskell-Ramsay, Associate Professor

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Nora Faltmann

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Dr Clare Pettinger, Lecturer Public Health Dietician and Food Plymouth (equality project)

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Dr Sue Reeves, Principal Lecturer

University of Salford

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University of South Wales

Dr Elizabeth Cookingham Bailey, Lecturer in Public Services

University of St Andrews

Dr Jo Mhairi Hale, Lecturer in Population Health

University of Sussex

Dr Catherine Will, Reader in the School of Law, Politics and Sociology

Tilburg University (Barcelona, Spain)

Frans Folkvord, Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences

University of Westminster

Dr Alizon Draper, Reader in Public Health Nutrition

University of Warwick

Thijs van Rens, Associate Professor, Stephen Jackson

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ENDS