

## HEALTH

# Activists demand Cabinet champion to fight 'evils' faced by children

Exclusive  
By Paul Gallagher

HEALTH CORRESPONDENT

Children and young people are caught in a "national emergency" that requires a new Cabinet post dedicated to helping them, say more than 160 charities and organisations.

The country's youth is "menaced by five 21st-century evils" the newly-formed Children First Alliance says. These five evils are: obesity and physical inactivity; adverse childhood experiences; rising mental health problems; dominance of social media and screen time influence; and socio-economic disadvantages.

Nearly a third of children aged between two and 15 are overweight or obese, while the annual spend on the treatment of obesity and diabetes is now greater than the money spent on the police, the fire service and the judiciary combined.

Fewer than one in five children are meeting the chief medical officer's guidelines of more than 60 minutes of activity a day and one in three do fewer than 30 minutes a day.

Approximately 850,000 children have a "clinically significant" mental health problem, with mental health services turning away a quarter of all child referrals, the activists claim.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, the Alliance says there is an "inescapable conclusion that firefighting on individual policy fronts will be insufficient to reverse the continuing powerful negative trends".

Charities that have joined the Alliance include the Royal Society for Public Health, Caudwell Children, The Children's Society and the Youth Sport Trust. The Alliance campaign, spearheaded by the Devon-based swim school Water Babies and its chief executive Steve Franks, is supported by the Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, and several politicians.

Baroness D'Souza, the former



Water Babies advocates teaching children to swim from an early age to increase confidence and safety

Lord Speaker, who has agreed to become president of the Alliance, told **i**: "Given the multitude of forces that work against the welfare of children of all ages, we urgently need a minister at Cabinet level."

Labour MP Lucy Powell has also backed the call. In its reply to the Alliance, the Government said there are "no current plans" to introduce a Cabinet minister for children, which has given the Alliance cause for optimism that one may be considered in the near-future.

Mr Franks said: "Post-Brexit there will be the biggest shake-up of Whitehall since the Second World War. Departments could be merged, so it's going to be very interesting what happens."

"All we're looking for is parity with women, with loneliness, which do have voices in the Cabinet."

## Comment

### A voice in politics needed

Steve Franks



Children First is a campaign to encourage government to put children at the heart of all decision-making.

We want to champion the importance of our children, improve their physical and mental health, push equality and inclusiveness and inspire the potential of the next generations.

And I believe that a Cabinet minister will help us to achieve this. Understanding that our future generation is worth fighting for and giving them a voice in politics is paramount to Children First. Globally, in 1990,

32 million children under the age of six were obese. By 2014, this figure had risen to 41 million.

The predicted figure for 2025 is 75 million. That is a truly shocking figure. And we need to act to change this. Despite increased awareness of mental health issues, the dominance of social media and the obesity crisis, there is still no dedicated person with authority to represent children in government.

We hope Children First and our petition will ultimately lead to the appointment of a new minister for children and young people, to give children an authoritative voice.

The writer is CEO of Water Babies and spokesman of the Children First Alliance

## SOCIETY

# Number of carers rise as support plunges

By Jane Clinton

Family carers who look after elderly relatives and sick children are receiving less help from councils even though the number of such carers is rising, NHS figures reveal.

Last year, public policy think-tank the Social Market Foundation calculated that there are 7.6 million people in the UK providing unpaid care for a relative. That figure is one million more than in 2005 and is one aspect of the care crisis engulfing the UK.

However, the number of family carers supported or assessed by councils fell by more than 2 per cent in 2018. With Britain's ageing population on the rise, so too is the number of people providing unpaid care to relatives. Since 2014, local authorities have had enhanced legal duties to assess the support needs of a wider range of carers.

But NHS Digital's own analysis shows that in 2017-18, 360,310 carers were supported or assessed by local authorities during that year. That is a 2.4 per cent fall from 2016-17. The figures will be presented by Professor Sue Yeandle of Sheffield University at a Social Market Foundation/Economic and Social Research Council event tomorrow discussing Britain's growing army of unpaid family carers. The minister for care, Caroline Dinenage, will also attend.

Professor Yeandle, one of Britain's leading authorities on care, said: "Carers face mounting pressures. Good local services, regular breaks and support to navigate the system can really help, but funding pressures on councils mean too few get the help they need."



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The number of 'evils' that campaigners say menace children today, requiring Cabinet-level attention

In Saturday's **i**weekend

## Gardening jobs for the weekend

Winter sedge, roses... and rogue foxes



1					2
	<b>The five-clue Cryptic Crossword</b>				
3					
	<b>No 2779</b>				
4					

Solution, page 46

### Across

- Excited, having hit top form, say (6)
- Church getting more somehow in plate? (6)
- Penalise financially again to improve (6)

### Down

- It nips D Beckham's ex-teammate right on the bottom (6)
- Remove obstruction blocking river (6)