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UK welfare reform: disastrous for the poorest children

The UK Government has an ambitious plan to reduce deficits in the UK's economy. However, this quest for recovery might be at the expense of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society. Last week, the [UK All-Party Parliamentary Group \(APPG\) on Health in All Policies released the findings](#) from their inquiry into the effects of the proposed Welfare Reform and Work Bill 2015–16 on child poverty and child health. The Bill sets out several changes to the UK welfare system, including reducing the benefit cap, freezing some benefits for 4 years, and restricting the amount of support provided by child tax credits—changes that will hit the poorest people the hardest. The Bill will also repeal most of the UK Child Poverty Act 2010, which set out to eradicate child poverty by 2020; in fact, the Bill has removed all child poverty reduction targets.

The APPG's findings showed that increased levels of child poverty directly worsen children's social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes, and the risk of infant mortality. Asthma, obesity, smoking, teenage pregnancy, and mental health disorders such as self-harm are also more prevalent in children from less affluent families.

The elimination of UK child poverty would save the lives of 1400 children aged younger than 15 years every year. However, the combined effect of the changes proposed by the Bill would significantly reduce the income of thousands of already struggling families, increasing child poverty and exacerbating the many risks to children's health and wellbeing. The APPG's recommendations include removal of the proposed benefits cap and reversal of the restrictions placed on child tax credits. It also recommends a full assessment of the cumulative effects of the Bill.

We are not surprised by the APPG's findings, but are concerned by them, and the fact that child poverty targets have been removed. We support their recommendations and hope that the government will stand by its promise to support the most vulnerable groups in the UK.