

# Hearts need more protection

Better prevent heart disease and stroke by addressing key risk factors

## We are in the grip of a heart care crisis

Over the past six decades, we've made huge strides in improving outcomes for people living with heart and circulatory diseases. Today, this progress is at risk. We knew things were challenging before the pandemic. But now, in its wake and with unrelenting pressure on NHS services, the situation is far worse. We have reached an impasse.

## Our hearts need and deserve more

If we want to stop this heart care crisis in its tracks, we need the UK Government to take bold, co-ordinated action on three fronts:

**Protection.** Better prevent heart disease and stroke by addressing drivers like obesity and smoking.

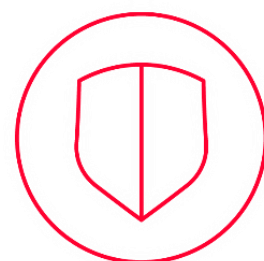
**Focus.** Prioritise NHS heart care to minimise the time it takes to get help.

**Breakthroughs.** Supercharge research to unlock future treatments and cures.

## Why our hearts need more protection

Not only are there thousands of people already waiting for heart care in England, but millions more across the UK are at elevated risk of heart attack and stroke. Nearly two thirds (64%) of adults in the UK are living with overweight or obesity and an estimated 6-8 million people are living with undiagnosed or uncontrolled high blood pressure, which risks putting further strain on our already overstretched health service.

Around 80% of cases of cardiovascular disease (CVD) in the UK can be attributed to modifiable risk factors such as high blood pressure, obesity, poor diet, and smoking, so action to address these is vital. Not only will this help drive productivity and boost the economy, but it will also help make a significant contribution to tackling health inequalities in the UK and ensure more people live well for longer, alleviating pressure on our health services.



## Protection

Population-level measures which aim to improve our environment and support people to live healthier lives are more likely to be effective and equitable than relying solely on individuals to take personal responsibility in an environment that heavily influences our choices. Government should:

### 1. Create a healthier food environment

Sugar and salt consumption in the UK are consistently above recommended levels, which can have long-term health effects. Eating too much sugar is a key contributor to obesity, while high salt intake increases the risk of high blood pressure which is associated with half of all heart attacks and strokes.

Most of the salt and sugar we eat is already in food we buy, so if we truly want to help people eat more healthily, we need to improve the nutritional content of our everyday foods by incentivising the food industry to reformulate products. Government should build on the success of the Soft Drinks Industry Levy – which removed 48,000 tonnes of sugar per year from soft drinks between 2015 and 2019, without harming soft drink sales – and consider a mandatory fiscal measure, such as the wholesale levy on salt and sugar proposed in the National Food Strategy. New modelling shows that such a levy could prevent over 1 million cases of CVD over 25 years. The funds raised could also be used to help families, especially those in more deprived communities, to access a healthier diet.

This must be delivered as part of a comprehensive package of measures to improve our wider food environment, including implementing the delayed measures to restrict junk food advertising on TV and online, and to end promotional offers on unhealthy products in store.

## 2. Introduce a “polluter pays” tobacco levy

Smoking continues to be a leading preventable cause of ill health and mortality in the UK, with at least 15,000 deaths each year from heart and circulatory diseases attributable to smoking tobacco. The Khan Review highlights that England will miss the UK Government’s “smokefree 2030” target by at least 7 years, and latest analysis from Cancer Research UK shows that the most deprived communities in England will not be smokefree until after 2050.

Government should commit to introducing a Smokefree Fund, constituted as a “polluter pays” levy on tobacco industry profits, as recommended in the Khan Review. This could provide a sustainable source of income, estimated at £700 million, towards measures to support people to quit smoking.

## 3. Establish a sustainable public health funding solution

The Public Health Grant (PHG) provides vital resource for local authorities in England to commission preventative services, including stop smoking support and weight management services. Studies have found an average £14 return to society for every £1 spent on public health interventions, and that prevention is significantly more cost-effective than treatment. However, Health Foundation analysis has shown a 26% real terms cut in the grant since 2015/16, with cuts disproportionately affecting the most deprived areas, risking exacerbating existing health inequalities.

To ensure that local authorities are able to appropriately provide services that work for their local populations, especially to those who need it the most, and safeguard the nation’s heart health, the PHG urgently needs additional investment of at least £1 billion a year. This must be accompanied by a long-term, sustainable and equitable funding solution to ensure that people are kept healthier longer, reducing future pressure on the NHS.

### How you can help

The scale of the challenge facing heart care is immense. We need your support to ensure this remains a cross-party, parliamentary and Government priority. Below are some actions you can take:

- **Call on the UK Government and your Party to take bold action on prevention**  
Please consider writing to the Public Health Minister to stress the need for action as outlined above. We would be happy to assist with draft messaging and supporting evidence.

Additionally, write to your Party policy team to urge them to prioritise action to prevent ill-health as they develop the manifesto ahead of the General Election.

- **Be a voice for heart patients in Parliament**  
Submit a question during Health and Social Care Oral Questions or a Written Parliamentary Question and advocate for one of our three key asks about how we can better prevent the causes of poor heart health:

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care:

1. What consideration he has given to the introduction of the wholesale levy on salt and sugar, proposed by the National Food Strategy, to drive reformulation of unhealthy foods and reduce people’s risk of developing obesity and high blood pressure.
2. What progress is being made towards the Smokefree 2030 ambitions; and if he will commit to introducing a “polluter pays” tobacco levy to raise vital funds for stop smoking services.
3. What conversations he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about developing a sustainable solution for public health funding.

- **Meet with us to find out more**  
Contact [westminster@bhf.org.uk](mailto:westminster@bhf.org.uk) to arrange a meeting to discuss the campaign in more detail.

Only with more protection, more focus and more research breakthroughs can we give people hope for a brighter, healthier future.

Please email Lucy Hewitson at [westminster@bhf.org.uk](mailto:westminster@bhf.org.uk) or visit [bhf.org.uk/HeartsNeedMore](https://bhf.org.uk/HeartsNeedMore) for more information.