

11. Inequality is bad for health

A combination of poverty, austerity and Covid caused 1m early deaths in England in the decade 2011-2020, related to living in socially disadvantaged areas, bad housing and unemployment. This is health inequality. It is NOT down to 'poor lifestyle choices', its causes are avoidable. Tackling them well or badly is a political choice. Justice and equity are founded on access to education, support for children in their early development, security of income and employment, sufficient food, safe and secure housing and amenities, social inclusion free from discrimination, an environment safe and protected from war, that should welcome refugees and migrants. All these are dangerously undermined by 14 years of austerity. The NHS safety net - access to free healthcare for all – is now threatened.

WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

- One million children in the UK are living in destitution (tripling 2017-2022); 4.2 million (29%) live in poverty but 48% of black and ethnically diverse children
- **335,000 excess deaths between 2012-2019 were linked to austerity**
- Life expectancy gains have stagnated or reversed since 2010 for the first time in 100 years
- The UK has the lowest sick pay of OECD countries, forcing people to go to work to feed their families even when they have Covid
- Despite the UK being the sixth richest country, it had the 2nd worst Covid outcome in Western Europe and those facing social inequalities were at greatest risk
- 6 in 10 people dying with Covid in 2020-21 were disabled and disabled people's benefits are under severe attack
- There is a two-tier health system placing disadvantaged people in greater danger of avoidable deaths and morbidity
- Deaths from homelessness and squalid homes are increasing; damp and mould in social housing killed 2 year-old Awaab Ishak in Rochdale (2020)

WHAT MUST HAPPEN NOW?

- Equity of access to healthcare for all – including disadvantaged groups
- Action to address social inequality, poverty, low pay and unsafe working conditions, poor housing, under-investment in children and young people, discrimination and racism, pollution, and climate change – the overarching causes of health inequality
- Improved women's health services and maternity care
- Action to ensure disabled people have equity of access to healthcare