

Rt Hon. Wes Streeting MP
Secretary of State
Department of Health and Social Care
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By email: dhsc.sofs@dhsc.gov.uk

13 November 2025

Dear Secretary of State

We are writing as senior health leaders to urge you **to commit to a national public health campaign about air pollution** to help the public understand its health impacts and reduce their exposure.

There is now overwhelming evidence that air pollution affects almost every organ in the human body, even at low concentrations. This includes the brain, lungs, cardiovascular system, metabolism, kidneys, liver, gastrointestinal tract, bones and skin. There is also now strong evidence that air pollution contributes to reduced cognition and dementia progression, including Alzheimer's disease. Yet there is a striking gap between that evidence and public understanding of these risks.

YouGov polling for the Royal College of Physicians reveals:

- **33% of the public said they did not consider air pollution to be a health risk to their health. 7% said they did not know.**
- While 84% of the public knew there was a link between air pollution and asthma, **other health risks remain hidden with respondents saying there was either no link, or that they didn't know if there was a link, between air pollution and diabetes (95%), dementia (83%), stroke (82%), heart disease (70%) and adverse pregnancy outcomes (55%).**

These findings show that the public do not recognise the full extent of the health harms across the life course posed by polluted air. This must change.

A 2025 report from the Royal College of Physicians revealed **that the equivalent of 30,000 deaths are estimated to be attributed to air pollution in 2025**, with an economic cost of £27 billion annually in the UK.

The public must have accurate and trusted information about how air pollution affects health, and the largest factors that adversely affect air quality indoors and outdoors. A campaign must give advice to help the public reduce their personal exposure, with a focus on vulnerable groups whose

health and wellbeing are disproportionately impacted by air pollution. **There is strong public appetite for this: 61% of respondents said they would support a government-led public health campaign** to raise awareness of air pollution's health risks and identify steps individuals can take to protect themselves.

We urge you to commit to a national public health campaign on air pollution similar to successful campaigns encouraging people to quit smoking – with the evidence base strengthening every day, air quality is quickly becoming as significant a risk to public health.

There is no safe level of air pollution. It must be recognised as a public health problem, not just an environmental one.

It is critical that blame for the problem is not transferred onto the public and those who disproportionately suffer the impacts. A public health campaign must be accompanied by robust government action to tackle emissions at source, including stronger PM2.5 targets in the review of the air quality strategy – as committed to by the government in the 10 Year Health Plan. We are also keen to see, a cross departmental indoor air quality strategy and improvements to public transport and active travel infrastructure.

Air pollution is a public health emergency affecting millions across the UK. Public concern and support for action are clear. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these findings and explore how we can work together to protect the nation's health.

Yours sincerely

Professor Mumtaz Patel, president, Royal College of Physicians

Professor Sir Stephen Holgate, special adviser on air quality, Royal College of Physicians

Professor Kamila Hawthorne, president, Royal College of General Practitioners

Professor Steve Turner, president, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

Dr Ian Higginson, president, Royal College of Emergency Medicine

Dr Lade Smith CBE, president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists

Professor Ranee Thakar, president, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

Rosamund Kissi-Debrah, chief executive officer, The Ella Roberta Foundation

Sarah Sleet, chief executive officer, Asthma and Lung UK

Larissa Lockwood, director of policy and campaigns, Global Action Plan

Dr Camilla Kingdon, chair, The Healthy Air Coalition