

Rt. Hon Boris Johnson MP  
No. 10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

cc: Rt. Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Rt. Hon Jonathan Ashworth MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Professor Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer

Dear Prime Minister,

### **National Voices' recommendations on public health reforms**

We are writing to set out the key recommendations which National Voices' members have raised for the Government's re-organisation of the public health system.

National Voices is the leading coalition of health and social care charities in England. We have more than 180 members covering a diverse range of health conditions and communities, connecting us with the experiences of millions of people. We work together to strengthen the voice of patients, service users, carers, their families and the voluntary organisations that work with and for them.

The restructure of the system creates an opportunity for an ambitious new approach to public health. Many of National Voices' members have submitted their own responses to the Government's consultation on their plans. This letter sets out some of the high-level concerns we share, and the opportunities that we would like to present, as representatives of the sector as a whole.

We hope that our proposals will help you during this development phase to create a system that delivers on the goal of creating a public health system that is fit for the future.

### **Office for Health Promotion**

We suggest that the Government considers calling the new Office the 'Office for Health Improvement', to better reflect the Government's important ambition, as set out in the *Transforming the Public Health System* paper, that we need to be "using the collective resources and strengths of the local system, the NHS, local authorities, the voluntary sector and others to improve the health of their area." This statement captures well the work that the new Office, and all those who work closely with it throughout the wider system, will

need to undertake. In contrast, the term ‘health promotion’ implies a hands-off approach focused more on individual action and awareness raising.

Whilst we recognise that the Government has a thorough understanding of the need for health improvement, the new structures are likely to be in place for some time and the names of its major components should reflect as closely as possible their core aims, as part of ensuring continuity of this agenda in future administrations.

### **Cross-Ministerial Board**

The Government needs to lead public health from the front and should connect health into all its agendas: productivity, levelling up, UK plc. The new cross-Ministerial Board should therefore not be chaired by a Minister from the DHSC, but should be chaired by either the Prime Minister or the Minister for the Cabinet Office, to help ensure that all Government departments are fully engaged in improving public health.

The public’s health, including its mental health, is the fundamental measure of the Government’s success, and responsibility must therefore lie at the highest level, ensuring health improvement is seen as everyone’s business.

The success of the UKHSA and the new public health office within DHSC will not simply depend on its set-up and managerial lines of accountability, important as those are, but on political leadership that understands the magnitude and complexity of the public health interventions which need to be delivered across society.

In addition to this leadership from the top, a **stakeholder advisory group** should be established to feed into the board, bringing together organisations including public health bodies and charities to advise on policy and implementation.

### **Developing a connected system**

The Government’s plan rightly notes that health security and health promotion are connected, but there is a clear risk that the creation of different bodies (the UKHSA and the public health office within DHSC) may inhibit delivery from being as joined-up as it needs to be. We recommend that each body explicitly sets out in its strategic plan how it will mitigate this risk and how its work will link with that of its counterpart, despite their likely very different culture and areas of focus.

This joined-up working will be particularly critical to ensure that in future public health crises:

- Making the connection between a pandemic and the social context in which it plays out
- Inequalities undermining infection control measures and
- Protecting the public’s mental health form a core part of the government response.

Representatives of National Voices' membership would of course be delighted to speak further with you about how the new system can work as effectively as possible for the people for whom we advocate.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Charlotte Augst**  
CEO, National Voices

### ***Together with***

Ian Lush OBE, Chief Executive, **Imperial Health Charity**

Jane Hanna OBE, CEO, **SUDEP Action**

Sue Farrington, Chief Executive, **Scleroderma & Raynaud's UK**

Peter Lyne, Founder, **Mobility and Support Information Service (MASIS)**

James Watson-O'Neill, CEO, **SignHealth**

Silvia Petretti, Chief Executive, **Positively UK**

Dawn Golder, Executive Director, **FND Hope UK**

Karen Friett, Chief Executive, **Lymphoedema Support Network**

Louise Wright, CEO, **Action for Pulmonary Fibrosis**

Carla Jones, CEO, **Allergy UK**

Maddy Deforges, CEO, **NAVCA**

Mark Rowland, Chief Executive, **The Mental Health Foundation**

Shantel Irwin, CEO, **Arthritis Action**

Alex Fox OBE FRSA, Chief Executive, **Shared Lives Plus**

Cat Divers, Founder and CEO, **MyPickle**

Chris Askew, Chief Executive, **Diabetes UK**

Shan Nicholas, Interim CEO, **Parkinson's UK**

Paul Farmer CBE, Chief Executive, **Mind**

Tony Thornburn, Chair, **Behcet's UK**

Sue Brown, CEO, **Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance (ARMA)**

Sarah Sleet, Chief Executive, **Crohn's & Colitis UK**

Clare Jacklin, Chief Executive, **National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS)**

Deborah Alsina MBE, Chief Executive, **Independent Age**