

Press Release
20th March 2024

A School Nurse in Every School: Sector Leaders call for Action

A new report published today calls for action to address the steep decline in the number of school nurses in England.

The report is based on a round table meeting of nursing leaders, charities and government on 15th December 2023. The round table was a joint initiative by The Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI), the College of Medicine, and the School and Public Health Nurses Association (SAPHNA). The report brings together evidence and insights about the decline in school nurse numbers since 2009, summarises the impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people, and offers a range of solutions.

There has been a 33% fall in the number of school nurses since 2009 across England, though this headline figure hides great variation: in some local authority areas school nursing is no longer commissioned at all. This is a clear instance of a postcode lottery with very serious consequences for families and for child health.

While the Healthy Child Programme 5-19 offers a plan for good child health, local authorities, which have commissioned school nursing since 2012 do not have the resources to deliver on the plan. School nurses are unable to work as true public health professionals, instead being limited to predominantly concentrate all nursing work on safeguarding for the most vulnerable.

The round table called for a range of actions to address the issues, including building national political will and encouraging Integrated Care Boards to prioritise school nursing within healthcare strategies for children and young people. Organisations such as SAPHNA and the QNI must also continue to support school nurses to raise their voice and demonstrate their value and impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people within the system.

Dr Crystal Oldman CBE, the QNI's chief executive commented, "It is remarkable that we are talking about building political will to improve the health of children in this country. School nursing services have been allowed to atrophy since they were transferred to cash-starved local authorities. We urgently need to invest in school nursing services that have a proven positive impact on the physical, mental and emotional health of children and young people at a crucial time in their lives. We have a duty of care that must be enacted today."

Sharon White OBE, CEO of the School and Public Health Nurses Association added, "The downward trajectory of our children's health is nothing less than horrifying. Re-emergence of Dickensian diseases such as rickets, scurvy and malnutrition, hospital admissions for teeth extractions, rises in vaping, in sexually transmitted diseases, all of this and more can be

positively impacted by urgently resourcing the school nursing workforce, who, trusted and respected by parents, children and schools alike and for relatively low investment, can change this picture and restore hope and respect for our children's futures."

Dr Michael Dixon OBE, the College of Medicine, who chaired the round table, welcomed the report saying: "A school nurse for every school is an ambition in the College's Hope for the Future manifesto (2021) and this is an important step in making it happen. Participants pledged to move into action to help ensure school nursing is prioritised with investment in this highly skilled workforce."

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Notes to Editors:

The round table meeting and the report were funded by Sanofi. Sanofi had no input into the subjects that were discussed. <https://www.sanofi.com/en/our-company/social-impact>

Online link to news release: <https://qni.org.uk/news-and-events/news/a-school-nurse-in-every-school-sector-leaders-call-for-action/>

Photographs from the event are available from the QNI.

The Queen's Nursing Institute is the oldest nursing charity in the world, founded in 1887 by William Rathbone and Florence Nightingale to organise the training and supply of District Nurses. Today it provides a wide range of professional and personal support to all nurses working in the community. It awards the title of Queen's Nurse and there are nearly 2500 Queen's Nurses working in all community nursing specialisms in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. www.qni.org.uk

SAPHNA is a registered charity, a professional organisation dedicated to the promotion of excellence in practice, taking forward the public health agenda by working in partnerships for the benefit of children and young people and the communities where they live and learn. <https://saphna.co/>

The College of Medicine and Integrated Health is a registered charity founded in 2010. The College advocates for a new attitude to healthcare: one which forges partnerships across society, emphasises prevention and a multi-faceted approach and empowers a healthier, happier population. <https://collegeofmedicine.org.uk/>