



## **Children's Commissioner for Jersey** Promoting and Protecting Children's Rights

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### **Access to GPs and the Right to Health**

Children and young people have the right to the highest attainable standard of health under international law, which explicitly includes access to healthcare. Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), is clear that no child should be deprived of their right to access health care services, placing a proactive duty on States to fulfil this obligation and remove any barriers to children accessing it.

I very much welcome the Government's announcement that more than 100 GPs will now be employed directly by the Government of Jersey, and that access to GPs will now be free of charge for children aged between zero and four years old, as will childhood immunisation. However, I am calling for this to be expanded to all children and young people up to the age of 18. I also note that 'pregnancy bundles' have now been capped at £120, however, I would call for this to also become free so as to support good prenatal and childhood health, as supported by a well-established evidence base.<sup>1</sup>

The UNCRC is clear that all children and young people up to the age of 18 are entitled to special measures of care and protection, including their right to health. This right applies to every child, as does their right to be free from discrimination under Article 2 of the UNCRC. Any fees to access healthcare services present barriers to children and young people from accessing their right.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has been clear on this, stating that "barriers to children's access to health services including financial, institutional and cultural barriers should be identified and eliminated".<sup>2</sup>

Every child and young person in Jersey should therefore be able to access healthcare for free regardless of the child or their family's economic situation, or any other factor as children are the rights holders and the State is the duty bearer.

The right to health not only includes the right to access services free of charge, it further means that children have the right to benefit from wider supports to enjoy the maximum standard of health that they can. This includes access to nutritious food, mental health support and wider wellbeing supports. The Government of Jersey must continue to support children to have the best standard of health that they can during the current health emergency and beyond.

It is important to continue to engage with children and young people about what they need support with so that the priorities are guided by the views and experiences of children in Jersey to provide the best possible support in this difficult time. Access to information in clear, accessible language to keep children informed and updated is hugely important, and will help to ease children's concerns throughout this time of uncertainty.

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<sup>1</sup> For example see Kuhnt J, Vollmer S Antenatal care services and its implications for vital and health outcomes of children: evidence from 193 surveys in 69 low-income and middle-income countries *BMJ Open* 2017;7:e017122. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2017-017122

<sup>2</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 15, paragraph 29

Protections for children's rights are just as necessary, if not more so, in times of crisis. However, since this shows that the Government employing GPs directly is possible and workable in Jersey, it is hard to see why this could not be extended beyond the Covid-19 outbreak. Ensuring that any child at any point in time can access their right to healthcare free of charge in Jersey is something that we should strive for at all times.