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Doctors Raise Alarm Over Worsening UK Child Poverty

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Child poverty in the United Kingdom is reaching alarming levels, with medical professionals warning of severe consequences for children's health. A delay in the government's strategy to address this crisis has only intensified concerns from experts and advocacy groups.

According to a recent survey conducted by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), a large majority of paediatricians have observed a rise in poverty-related

illness among children over the past two years. Nearly all respondents (99%) confirmed that poverty is contributing to poor health in their young patients. The same study found that 96% of these medical professionals believe poor housing conditions, such as damp and overcrowded environments, are directly impacting children's well-being.

Beyond housing, doctors reported increasing instances where poverty hindered proper access to healthcare. Families are struggling to afford basic travel costs, parking fees, and childcare when attending medical appointments. These barriers not only delay treatment but also deepen the long-term effects of poverty on children's development.

Dr. Helen Stewart, the RCPCH officer for health improvement, called the situation "unbearable," emphasising how the strain is felt not only by families but also by the medical staff trying to care for affected children. "This is a crisis that demands decisive action from the Government," she said, urging leaders to prioritise long-term solutions that support vulnerable families.

The issue has reignited calls to remove the two-child limit on benefits, a policy that restricts financial assistance through Universal Credit (UC) and Child Tax Credit to the first two children in most households. Advocacy organisations argue that this measure is pushing more than 200 children into poverty each day. The Child Poverty Action Group estimates that eliminating the cap could immediately lift around 490,000 children out of poverty.

Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer announced the formation of a ministerial taskforce on child poverty in July 2024, pledging to ensure every child has the best possible start in life. However, the child poverty strategy originally scheduled for spring has been postponed until autumn to align with the Chancellor's budget.

Latest figures show that approximately 4.3 million children in the United Kingdom live in households with relatively low income after housing costs, marking one of the highest numbers recorded since 2002. Despite government efforts, including investment in early childhood support and school meals, experts warn that more targeted and immediate action is necessary.

Child Poverty Action Group Chief Executive Alison Garnham described the crisis as "an appalling toll on the nation's children," calling on the government to back up its promises with meaningful change.

As warnings grow louder from professionals and campaigners alike, all eyes will be on the forthcoming strategy, hoping it moves beyond rhetoric and delivers real, measurable outcomes for the country's most vulnerable children.