MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit Consultation Response

Title of consultation
Welfare Foods - a consultation on meeting the needs of children and families in Scotland

Name of the consulting body
Scottish Government

Link to consultation

Why did the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit contribute to this consultation?
We have evidence from the NIHR funded Evaluation of the Health in Pregnancy Grant and the Evaluation of the Healthy Start Voucher Scheme

We were able to respond to 2 of the 11 questions.

Our consultation response
1. How can we increase the uptake and awareness of the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods?
Using Growing Up in Scotland Birth Cohort 2 data, the uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers in 2010 was 75%. From our NIHR funded qualitative study1 of 40 interviews with mothers who claimed the vouchers and mothers who were eligible but did not claim the vouchers, we found that most mothers started using the vouchers after their child was born; they rarely knew of or used them during pregnancy.
One way to increase awareness and uptake is to link the eligibility data from the benefits office (currently Department of Work and Pensions) with pregnancy status. DWP have information on who is in receipt of the qualifying benefits. The midwife or healthcare professional can notify DWP when someone is pregnant and then, using the linkage, DWP can match pregnancy with eligibility and the vouchers can be sent automatically to the pregnant woman.
We have carried out work to evaluate the Health in Pregnancy Grant2, which was a universal benefit and 96% of pregnant women had booked with a midwife by 25 weeks pregnant in 2013. Automatically linking pregnancy data to benefits data could substantially increase uptake.

5. What could an innovative programme that will support families to establish healthy eating patterns look like?
Giving healthy eating advice at the right time may improve its effectiveness. Our qualitative work1 found that mothers did not recall any nutritional advice from the midwife or health visitor when they discussed the Healthy Start Vouchers. Giving advice on a healthy diet at the stage when a mother has a newborn baby might not be the most appropriate time. Healthy eating advice around the time weaning is starting and also when the child is older, starting nursery.

1 https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/programmes/phr/1316410/#/
2 https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/phr/phr05060#/full-report

When was the response submitted?
28 June 2018

Find out more about our research in this area
1 https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/programmes/phr/1316410/#/
2 https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/phr/phr05060#/full-report

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