
How a data led approach has boosted take up of Healthy Start across three London boroughs

Evaluation report for the Greater London Authority

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Executive summary

Over [250,000 children](#) live in food insecurity in London.

Healthy Start, created in 2006, helps pregnant women and families with children under four access fresh fruit, vegetables, milk and infant formula. However, each year, low income Londoners miss out on [£9.9 million](#) in support due to low awareness of the scheme and its complex application process.

The Greater London Authority's Equality and Fairness team partnered with Policy in Practice and three London authorities in the first digital take up campaign to use data analytics to help London families experiencing food insecurity and financial hardship.

The campaign's goal was to increase Healthy Start take up and test the ability to send text messages for benefit take up campaigns while developing a campaign tool for local authorities to use for cost and resource effective data led campaigns. This is the first major Healthy Start take up campaign to use both digital and paper communications.

This campaign demonstrates the power of proactive use of administrative data, setting the standard for regional take up campaigns.

Across the period of this campaign take up of Healthy Start grew by 5.4% on average in participating boroughs compared to a 0.7% decrease in other boroughs over the same period¹

Even in participating boroughs, a traditional campaign, running for 12 months by letter, led to a 1% take up rate. This data is not detailed at the individual level so we cannot conclusively say that all of this take up was due to this campaign, however, the difference between participating pilot boroughs and non-participating boroughs is clear.

For every £1 spent on the text and letter campaign, £11 in income was generated for Londoners. For a text only campaign, the return rose to £131 for every £1 spent

In its first year, the campaign will deliver £30,800 to 274 households. If residents continue to claim Healthy Start until their child turns four, they will receive over £106,000 in support.

¹ Data taken from NHS BSA uptake data (<https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/healthcare-professionals/>) which shows the number of people on the digital healthy start scheme. The increase in % take up is based on the number of households claiming as the number eligible is not available at this time.

The real life impacts of the campaign cannot be overstated. Two residents shared the difference this campaign made to them, below.

"I'm so blessed to get Healthy Start, it's a big help to buy my baby's food. It's like £14 a tin. Healthy Start vouchers mean I get to keep my baby on his tinned milk for longer. Many thanks to Healthy Start for helping me."

"I didn't know there was something like that until I received a letter from my council. I've two kids and have never applied for this."

This report shows the impact of the Healthy Start take up campaign, shares feedback from the councils and residents and outlines the methodology for future regional level campaigns.

Campaign methodology

Policy in Practice's Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) platform combines datasets, together with a built in welfare policy engine, to paint a clearer picture of residents' benefit entitlements and debts.

Audience

LIFT identified households that were likely to be eligible for Healthy Start by identifying families who:

- Have at least one child under four years old; and
- Receive Universal Credit and earn less than £408 a month; or
- Receive Child Tax Credit, earn less than £16,190 per year and don't receive Working Tax Credit

In this campaign LIFT identified the following number of households across three London boroughs:

- 1,024 households in Haringey
- 998 households in Lewisham
- 949 households in Redbridge

Letters

To raise awareness of the scheme, letters were sent to each household informing them of their Healthy Start eligibility and the steps needed to claim this support.

For this campaign local authorities helped to design the letters that were sent to residents. Each council customised the letter with bespoke information on its voluntary community sector partners and the council support available to help households to apply.

Some councils offered additional support to their residents by taking inbound calls to help them to claim, or signposted them to relevant local services such as Citizens Advice.

At the end of each letter, households had the option of completing a short survey about the process of claiming Healthy Start by visiting a website address or scanning a QR code. Once the survey was completed, households could enter a draw to win a £30 Love to Shop voucher.

Text messages

Where phone numbers were provided we also sent text messages to eligible households. Four working days after the letters were sent, households received up to three text messages.

The first message informed the household that they may be eligible to receive Healthy Start.

The second text message, sent one day later, asked households for their consent to receive the feedback survey. Households could text YES to receive the link to the survey. Households could opt out by not responding to this message.

The third text message, sent immediately after receipt of YES, contained the link to the survey. The feedback survey consisted of five short questions, taking about two minutes to complete. The questions can be found below.

This survey would measure the impact of the messages on take up rates, and also give residents the chance to share their experiences of claiming Healthy Start.

At the end of the survey households could enter a prize draw to win a £30 Love to Shop. One winner was chosen for each of the participating local authorities.

Feedback survey questions

1. What borough do you live in?
2. Have you applied for the Healthy Start Scheme?
 - a. Yes as a result of your messages
 - b. Yes, I had already applied anyway
 - c. No, but I plan to soon
 - d. No, I don't plan to
3. Why hadn't you applied before? (give multiple choice)
 - a. I don't want to engage with the benefit system
 - b. The application process was confusing
 - c. It won't make much of a difference to me
 - d. I didn't know it existed
 - e. I didn't know I was eligible

4. How helpful have you found our messages about unclaimed benefits?

- a. Very unhelpful
- b. Unhelpful
- c. Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- d. Helpful
- e. Very helpful

5. Do you have any other feedback?

Campaign results

Reporting on results of the campaign

Policy in Practice estimates that households across London are missing out on [£9.9 million](#) in Healthy Start every year. Healthy Start is worth up to £440 per year for a household with a child under one, and £220 every subsequent year until a child's fourth birthday. In the context of the cost of living crisis, ensuring households claim what they are eligible for is a key priority for local authorities.

The [NHS releases monthly figures](#) on the number of people on the digital Healthy Start Scheme. This dataset contains information on the number of households on the digital Healthy Start scheme by local authority. Due to an issue in their source data, the NHS has recalled their figures for the number of people eligible for the scheme and the take up percentage in July 2024. No other figures have been affected by this issue.

Now, their dataset includes the number of people on the digital scheme. This number shows the people who applied to HS through the online application *and* have been issued a prepaid card.

We measured the growth in the number of people on the digital scheme to estimate the number of people who claimed Healthy Start over the course of the campaign, and show the percentage change in those registered. See the results in the table below:

The campaign in numbers

	Outcome
Councils participating	3
Households targeted for letter	2,974
Letters sent	2,367
Text messages sent	2,891
Healthy Start feedback survey responses	187
Successful claims (March to June 2024)	274
Average increase in Healthy Start take up	5.4%
Total impact so far	£30,860
Total claim value if household claims until child turns 4	£106,150

Campaign impact on take up of Healthy Start

In two months the campaign helped to increase Healthy Start take up by 5.4% in each borough. During the same time period, the Healthy Start take up decreased by -0.7% (range = -4% to + 2%) in the other London boroughs. The table below shows the results by participating boroughs.

	Households now claiming Healthy Start in June 24	% increase in Healthy Start take up
Haringey Council	83	5.4%
Lewisham Council	93	4.7%
Redbridge Council	98	6.4%
Total	274	5.4%

Slightly more households are claiming Healthy Start in Redbridge, across the participating councils. In the same time period, the Healthy Start uptake decreased by -0.7% (range = -4% to + 2%) in the other London boroughs.

Compared to other boroughs, it is clear that sending letters and text messages helped encourage households to claim what they were eligible for. This campaign demonstrates the impact of raising awareness on tackling low benefit take up rates.

Economic impact to residents

This campaign delivered over £30,800 to 274 households in Healthy Start vouchers.

- **For every £1 spent on the campaign, £11 in income was generated for residents, demonstrating the success of this campaign for Londoners**
- **If residents claim Healthy Start until their child's fourth birthday, the lifetime entitlement for these residents is more than £106,000**

Impact of text messages

The campaign demonstrates the power of digital communications in benefits take up campaigns.

In total 40.45% of households who received the text message clicked the link to take them to the page to apply (range = 37.25% to 44.89%). Slightly more households clicked to the Healthy Start Application page in Redbridge.

Council	% of households who clicked link to the Healthy Start application page in the text message
Haringey Council	44%
Lewisham Council	37%
Redbridge Council	45%
Total	41%

Insights from feedback survey

An average of 6% of households asked to receive the survey. Across all households we contacted via letter or text message 6% or 189 households completed the survey.

Our previous work surveying households tells us that roughly 3% of people contacted for feedback surveys respond. We doubled the expected rate of survey participation in our campaign. Haringey has the highest number of households that responded to the survey message.

Council	% households who responded to the survey message
Haringey Council	8.38%
Lewisham Council	4.36%
Redbridge Council	5.87%
Total	5.61%

In total 6.36% of those who received any communications, letter or text message, responded to the survey.

- **42% of households surveyed said they have or will apply to Healthy Start because of the messages they received from the campaign**

The survey demonstrated the impact of the messages on households.

42% of households surveyed shared that they applied to Healthy Start or are about to apply because of our messages. They also shared with us:

- 91 households had already applied (which could have been due to the letter) (48.1%)
- Of the 71 who answered the question, 34 of the households had not applied to Healthy Start because they did not know it existed (47%)
- 19 households said they don't plan to apply (10.1%)
- Of the 153 who answered the question, 97 of them said the messaging was helpful or very helpful (63.4%)
- 51 said it was unhelpful or very unhelpful (33%) but most of them said they either had already applied or weren't going to apply

This survey highlights how many young families are missing out on Healthy Start Support due to low awareness of the scheme. It also demonstrates the importance of different communication methods in encouraging people to take up this much needed support.

With almost half of those contacted making new claims to Healthy Start as a result of the texts and letters, this campaign shows us that data driven solutions are highly effective at combating household barriers to the take up of support.

This campaign demonstrates what can be achieved when local authorities collaborate. Participating authorities, under the leadership of the Greater London Authority, have delivered life changing support that helps families to put food on the table, maximising economies of scale and making the most effective use of scarce resources.

Feedback from residents and councils

Residents had positive experiences receiving the letter and text messages about Healthy Start. In the feedback survey, they shared the following with us:

"I'm so blessed to get Healthy Start, it's a big help to buy my baby's food. It's like £14 a tin. Healthy Start vouchers mean I get to keep my baby on his tinned milk for longer. Many thanks to Healthy Start for helping me."

"I didn't know there was something like that until I received a letter from my council. I've two kids and have never applied for this."

"I have two children, one 7 years old and the other 1 year old, this help will be very helpful"

"Should of started to do this a lot earlier and you need to update with so much more"

"Thank you for the reminder as many don't realise they are entitled."

"Making our life a bit easier for us."

It is very clear that the families valued the support they were receiving. They voiced their hopes that future campaigns like this one would continue , so that more young parents would know of their eligibility for this extra support.

Participating councils shared the following with us.

"The Healthy Start Take Up campaign has had a remarkable impact on our community. It has not only provided much-needed financial support to hundreds of households but also enhanced the overall well-being of our residents and children. The substantial return on investment underscores the campaign's effectiveness and importance. We are proud to be a part of this initiative and look forward to seeing continued positive outcomes."

Hameeda Saeed, Development Officer, Redbridge Council

"We're delighted that our efforts to increase Healthy Start uptake have helped an additional 93 families receive £26k per year collectively. This campaign has underpinned our outreach work to ensure the message reaches those families in need. It also demonstrates the potential for further proactive targeting that encourages households to access the support they are entitled to."

Gemma King, Programme Manager, Lewisham Council

Conclusion: Data led approach increases Healthy Start take up for Londoners by 5%

This project demonstrates the power of proactive use of administrative data, setting the standard for regional take up campaigns.

The GLA Healthy Start campaign increased Healthy Start take up by an average of 5.4% in each participating borough, compared to an -0.7% decrease in other boroughs. For every £1 spent on the campaign, £11 in income was generated for Londoners.

In only three months it has delivered over £30,800 to more than 274 households, with a lifetime entitlement for these residents of more than £106,000.

This campaign also helps to reduce the impact of poverty on young families. Poverty touches all aspects of life and is the main driver behind many pervasive social issues.

Living on a low income increases poor physical and mental health, impacts education attainment, acts as a barrier to employment, and reduces both average life expectancy and the amount of healthy life a person will live. Areas impacted by high poverty rates see slower economic growth, greater demand for health, social care, and local government services, higher crime rates, and greater social divisions.

Food insecurity has become increasingly common amongst those on the lowest income. As food inflation skyrocketed during the cost of living crisis in 2022, over [250,000 children](#) live in food insecurity in London alone.

Lower income households often spend a higher proportion of their income on food than higher income households. But many have been unable to cope with rising prices. In 2023 [nearly 3 million families](#) relied on emergency food parcels because they do not have to cover their food costs.

Food insecurity is linked to malnutrition, obesity, poor mental health, and fewer educational and employment opportunities in later life (Barrett 2024, p2). It is linked to [increased debt](#) for low income households in cases where households rely on credit to put food on the table.

Healthy Start was created to tackle food insecurity by helping young families with food costs. For many low income young families, food support is the only way for them to afford food given how low most working aged benefits are. With food banks under immense pressure to help more families with food parcels, increasing access to this national support is more important than ever.

Studies show that Healthy Start take up is linked with [improved dietary outcomes](#) and [improved physical health in the longer term](#). Many families who claim Healthy Start are [happy for extra support for their children](#).

Greater positive impacts on health and financial resilience would be realised if the [value of Healthy Start Support kept pace with inflation](#), and more local shops in rural or ethnic communities were registered in the scheme.

A successful data led approach that can be adopted elsewhere

The success of this campaign can be replicated and scaled across other regions and other benefits. With [£23 billion of benefits and support unclaimed each year](#) much more can be done to connect millions of people to the support they are missing out on.

Policy in Practice works with over one in five local authorities across the UK, supporting them to run locally led, data driven, targeted campaigns to support their residents to build their financial strength.

These campaigns have high success rates and returns on investment, putting millions of pounds into people's pockets. Their success is largely due to the sophisticated targeting of resources to the relevant households and the local knowledge that local authorities bring to the campaigns.

Policy in Practice works with administrative data to identify people missing out on support, including Pension Credit, Attendance Allowance, Free School Meals, Healthy Start, Universal Credit, social tariffs and Council Tax Support. This information is available at a local authority level.

To learn more about Policy in Practice's work with local authorities, how much support is unclaimed in your area and how you can run take up campaigns please contact us via hello@policyinpractice.co.uk.

Appendix A: Letter, text and survey sent

An example of the letter sent:



London Borough of Lewisham
PO Box 58996
London
SE6 9JD

<<date2>>

Dear <<FullName>>

Important: You may be able to claim Healthy Start worth up to £280 a year

We think you may be able to claim Healthy Start if you are not already.

Healthy Start is worth up to £280 a year and can help you buy food and milk for your children if they are under 4 years old or for yourself if you are over 10 weeks pregnant.

How much you will get will depend on the age of your children or your stage of pregnancy.

You can get Healthy Start if you:

- Have at least one child under four years old or are over 10 weeks pregnant or
- Get Universal Credit and you earn less than £408 a month or
- Get Child Tax Credit, earn less than £16,190 per year and don't get Working Tax Credit

You can apply online or by phone depending on your circumstances.

- If you receive Universal Credit you can apply online at www.healthystart.nhs.uk
- If you receive Child Tax Credit and have children under four or are pregnant you can apply online at www.healthystart.nhs.uk
- If you are claiming Child Tax Credits and have children over four or are pregnant you can email healthy.start@nhsbsa.nhs.uk or call 0300 330 7010

If you are pregnant, recently gave birth or have a child under four and live in the borough, you can also get free vitamin D supplements. Visit your local pharmacy or Family Hub to register.

For more advice, support and guidance for you and your children, visit www.lewisham.gov.uk/familyhubs.

We would like you to complete a short survey to hear about your experience claiming Healthy Start.

Please visit www.bit.ly/HealthyStartsurvey or scan the QR code to access the survey.

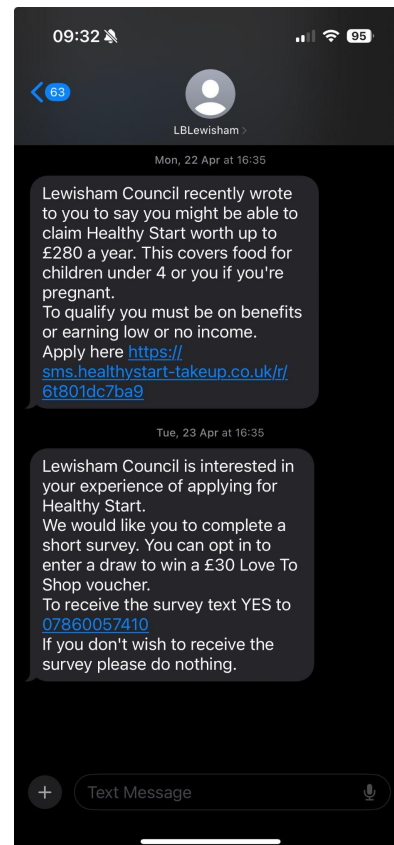


When you complete the survey, you can opt in to enter a draw with a chance to win a £30 Love To Shop voucher.

Yours sincerely

Lewisham Council Public Health

An example of a text sent:



An example of the survey sent:

Healthy Start take up campaign survey

Please give us your feedback

Please complete this short survey to tell us about your experience applying for the Healthy Start Scheme.
You can choose to enter a prize draw for a chance to win a £30 Love To Shop voucher

* 1. What borough do you live in?

* 2. Have you applied for the Healthy Start Scheme?

☐ Yes, as a result of your messages

☐ Yes, I had already applied anyway

☐ No, but I plan to soon

☐ No, I don't plan to

Please tell us more if desired

Next

Appendix B: Survey responses

Healthy Start take up campaign survey		
Q1. What borough do you live in?		
Answer choices	Responses	
Haringey	44.09%	82
Lewisham	28.49%	53
Redbridge	27.42%	51
	Answered	186
	Skipped	0

Q2. Have you applied for the Healthy Start Scheme?		
Answer choices	Responses	
Yes, as a result of your messages	26.34%	49
Yes, I had already applied anyway	48.39%	90
No, but I plan to soon	16.67%	31
No, I don't plan to	8.60%	16
Please tell us more if desired		33
	Answered	186
	Skipped	0

Q3. Why hadn't you applied before?		
Answer choices	Responses	
I don't want to engage with the benefit system	6.94%	5
The application process was confusing	16.67%	12
It won't make much of a difference to me	1.39%	1

I didn't know it existed	51.39%	37
I didn't know I was eligible	23.61%	17
Please tell us more if desired		6
	Answered	72
	Skipped	114

Q4. How helpful have you found our messages about unclaimed benefits?		
Very unhelpful	31.61%	49
Unhelpful	1.94%	3
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	3.23%	5
Helpful	23.87%	37
Very helpful	39.35%	61
Total		155