

Public Opinion Briefing: What do **Conservative** Voters Think About Public Health?

This briefing covers the following:

- Quantitative and qualitative data on what **Conservative** voters think about public health policies
- Implications and insights about how to discuss health with **Conservative** voters and politicians

Introduction

Public opinion consistently supports government action to improve the nation's health - not just by treating illness, but by tackling the root causes like unhealthy food, smoking, alcohol, housing, and working conditions.

Yet public health policies often face political hesitation, driven by fears of overreach and concern about being seen as 'nanny state', although history shows these fears are misplaced: once implemented, public health measures tend to grow in popularity. Political strategists argue that it's not just 'overall' levels of support for public health policies which matter to policymakers, but the political opinion of target voter groups which matter.

Two recent pieces of research carried out by Public First, for Health Equals and the IPPR¹, and Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), the Alcohol Health Alliance (AHA) and the Obesity Health Alliance (OHA)² examine how different groups of voters think about public health policies.

Views of Conservative voters

This briefing looks specifically at data on policy support among Conservative voters, including those who have previously voted Conservative in 2024, and those who are open to voting Conservative in the next election.* This group has often been characterised as exhibiting ideological objections to state 'overreach' and infringements on personal liberty, but as for other voter groups, this research suggests that Conservative voters and those open to voting Conservative want to see Government do more to help people live healthily. *This is particularly true of voters who supported the Conservative Party in 2019 and switched to Labour in 2024.*

* Conservative voters/ Conservative vote intention – those who have said they intend to vote Conservative at the next election

Con 2019 to Labour 2024 voters – those who voted Conservative in 2019, but switched to Labour in 2024

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Open to Conservative voters - those who have said they'd be open to voting Conservative at the next election

1. There is clear support for regulating business alongside personal responsibility to improve health

- 85% of people who say they will vote Conservative at the next election say individuals are responsible for their health - but 71% want protection from harmful business practices, meaning Conservative voters are generally in line with the national average view (75% and 73% respectively). *This indicates Conservative voters value individual responsibility but don't see it conflicting with a protective role from Government.*²
- The vast majority of Conservative voters - 77% - believe companies prioritise profit over health; only 32% trust them to be honest about health impacts. *Deep scepticism about business strengthens the case for regulation with Conservative voters.*²
- 88% see smoking, 82% alcohol, and 84% unhealthy food as major drivers of NHS pressure. *Health and NHS sustainability are core public concerns for Conservatives.*²
- 71% of voters open to voting Conservative say that the government has a great or fair deal of responsibility for ensuring people stay healthy, broadly in line with 72% of voters in general, and 71% of those who voted for the Conservatives in 2019 and Labour in 2024. 55% of voters open to the Conservative Party say that local authorities have a great or fair deal of responsibility for ensuring people stay healthy, compared to 54% of voters in general, and 54% of those who voted Conservative in 2019 and Labour in 2024.¹ *Conservatives would like their leaders to take responsibility for their voter's health*

2. Conservative-leaning voters are supportive of specific public health measures and generally in line with the national average

Conservative voters and target Conservative voters were, in general, somewhat supportive of both 'classic' public health policies (increased regulation of tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food and drink) and more action on the wider determinants of health (community infrastructure, housing, employment). The voters who the Conservatives would have to win back to win an election (those who voted Conservative in 2019 and Labour in 2024) tend to be more supportive of public health measures than other voters open to the Conservatives.

Support for policies to reduce harm from risk factors²

Policy	Con 2019 to Labour 2024 voters	Conservative vote intention	National average
Increasing the age at which tobacco can be bought so no one born from 2009 can legally be sold tobacco to phase out smoking in future generations	82%	76%	72%
Extending smoking ban to outdoors in cafes, bars and restaurants to protect people from second-hand smoke inhalation in public spaces	71%	69%	65%

A levy on companies in the tobacco industry to raise funds to reduce smoking rates	78%	71%	68%
Warning labels on alcohol	84%	74%	75%
Introduce a minimum price for alcoholic drinks equal to 65p for each unit of alcohol they contain to reduce harmful alcohol consumption	53%	47%	46%
Clear and consistent nutrition labels on all food and drink products	90%	84%	84%
Extend the sugary drinks tax to other types of unhealthy food to discourage consumption of unhealthy products and encourage companies to make products healthier	61%	62%	59%
Restrictions to stop children seeing unhealthy food and drink adverts	80%	66%	65%

Support for policies to tackle wider social determinants of health¹

Policy	Con 2019 to Labour 2024 voters	Voters open to Con	National average
Increasing the minimum pay employees are entitled to receive when they're off sick and making it easier to claim, so they're better supported during illness	65%	57%	61%
Allowing individuals with a long-term health problem to keep their disability benefit if returning to employment doesn't work out, to encourage them to look for work	65%	61%	63%
Requiring employers to offer flexible working practices to improve employee health	88%	64%	69%
Increasing the use of Fair Work Charters, where employers publicly commit to taking steps to building fair working environments (e.g. ensuring employees are involved in decision-making processes for their companies)	71%	63%	64%
Greater government investment in community infrastructure e.g. youth centres, leisure facilities	85%	72%	75%
Higher housing standards for landlords to ensure better living conditions for tenants	88%	78%	80%
More government investment into early childhood development programmes like Sure Start or family hubs to support families	73%	67%	70%
Free school meals for all children in state-funded schools	75%	62%	67%

Removing the two-child benefit cap, which limits child tax credit and universal credit payments to the first two children in a family, to reduce childhood poverty	50%	43%	44%
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When asked to pick their top three priorities on public health, Labour 2024 voters who supported the Conservatives in 2019 selected inadequate mental health support (51%), taking action on: damp and mould in properties (49%) and the limited availability of nutritious food (34%). Other voters open to voting Conservative selected damp and mould in properties (47%), inadequate mental health support (39%) and limited availability of nutritious food (30%).¹

3. What Works: Messaging and Framing

Polling and focus-grouping conducted for this research gives some insight into how public health interventions can be framed to elected Conservative officials, as well as their current voters and target voters, to maximise support.

Frames that are most likely to increase support for public health interventions among this voter group include: public health interventions protecting the NHS or reducing pressure on healthcare services and the welfare state more broadly and linking improvements in health to economic growth.

Messaging principles for discussing public health with Conservative voters and politicians

- **Health messages are more effective when they are anchored in lived reality, not abstract policy language:**
 - When asked about health, people spoke in terms of impact on daily activities like going to work, spending time with friends or looking after family. Good health was framed as an enabler to people ‘getting on with things’ and living life as normal.
 - Use of terms such as ‘social determinants’ of health did not connect with focus group participants, who spoke instead of concrete, everyday things: warm homes, steady incomes, having the time and energy to cook a healthy meal or go for a walk.
- **Voters open to the Conservative Party are more likely to connect with framing about the link between health and the economy.**
 - In focus groups, those open to the Conservatives specifically emphasised the links between productivity and poor health and the knock-on effects that poor health could have on wages.
 - Voters open to the Conservative Party were far more likely to draw links between health and the economy than voters on average.
- **Reducing pressures on the NHS and other public services came out as the key reason for improving public health**

- Conservative voters are particularly likely to trace a connection between poor health and high public service spending. While voters of all parties noted that the NHS was picking up the pieces when it came to the nation's health, Conservative voters particularly focused on increasing spending on benefits as a result of poor health.

4. Summary

Individuals who voted Conservative in 2019 and switched to Labour in 2024, and those open to voting Conservative in the future want to see the government do more to help people live healthily suggesting a strong focus on health could help secure the party support.

They value personal responsibility but also think the government must play a role in helping people be healthier including by regulating businesses.

Our research suggests that to increase support for public health interventions among this group, emphasize messaging that frames these interventions as protecting the NHS (without stigmatising individuals) or easing pressure on healthcare services and the welfare system more broadly. Additionally, highlight how improving public health can contribute to economic growth.

¹ Research commissioned by Health Equals and IPPR. Online survey conducted between 21 Feb-5 March 2025 by Public First. 2,010 UK adults. All results are weighted using Iterative Proportional Fitting, or 'Raking'. The results are weighted by interlocking age & gender, region and social grade to Nationally Representative Proportions.

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