

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

This briefing covers the following:

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

This briefing looks specifically at the views of existing Labour voters, plus those who are open to voting Labour in a future election.

* Particular attention is paid to voter groups considered particularly volatile - those who switched from the Conservatives to Labour in 2024 and those who voted Labour in 2024 and are now open to voting Reform. This group in particular has been characterised in political commentary and by Labour strategists as potentially being most hostile to 'nanny-statism' and government intervention on health. **This briefing finds that in actual fact, these voters are as, if not more, supportive of public health interventions than Labour's 'core' constituency.**

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

Labour voters open to Reform – those who voted Lab in 2024 and now intend to vote Reform at the next election

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

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

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

- 73% of those who intend to vote Labour in the next election say they are responsible for their own health - but 84% want protection from harmful business practices, *showing Labour voters value Government intervention more than other voters (national average is 73%).*²
- The vast majority of Labour voters (84%) believe companies prioritise profit over health – higher than any other voter group; only 30% trust companies to be honest about the health impacts of their products. *Deep scepticism about the motivations and actions of business, particularly the food and drinks, alcohol and tobacco industries, from Labour voters strengthens the case for regulation.*²
- 88% see smoking, 85% alcohol, and 86% unhealthy food as major drivers of NHS pressure. *Health and NHS sustainability are core public concerns for Labour voters.*²
- Labour voters who are now open to voting for Reform are more likely than other voters to say that the Government has a fair or great deal of responsibility to ensure that people are healthy. 72% of people on average agree with that statement, 82% of Labour voters from 2024 who are now open to voting Reform, say that the government has a great or fair deal of responsibility for ensuring people stay healthy. *Labour voters would like their leaders to take responsibility for their voter's health.*²
- Only 25% of those open to voting for Labour saw 'limiting personal choice' as a risk of public health measures. There was more concern that measures would not be effective, would increase taxes, or increase the cost of living. 27% of Labour 2024 voters now open to Reform were concerned about infringements on personal choice, lower than the national average.¹ *'Nanny state' backlash is overstated.*

2. Labour voters or voters open to Reform are highly supportive of key public health measures

As well as looking at the overall attitudes of Labour voters and target Labour voters to public health interventions, our research examined support for individual policies. *Labour voters and target Labour voters were, in general, highly 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). Voters who are now open to Reform or who had previously voted Conservative were as, if not more, likely to support public health interventions than the average voter open to Labour.*

Support for policies to reduce harm from risk factors²

Policy	Labour vote intention	Labour 2024 voters open to Reform	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	79%	69%	72%

Extending smoking ban to outdoors in cafes, bars and restaurants to protect people from second-hand smoke inhalation in public spaces	74%	70%	65%
A levy on companies in the tobacco industry to raise funds to reduce smoking rates	74%	67%	68%
Warning labels on alcoholic drinks about the health risks of alcohol consumption	84%	85%	75%
Introduce a minimum price for alcoholic drinks equal to 65p for each unit of alcohol they contain to reduce harmful alcohol consumption	57%	57%	47%
Restrict alcohol marketing in the same way as junk food products to limit its appeal to children and young people	78%	75%	69%
Clear and consistent nutrition labels on all food and drink products	88%	86%	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	72%	66%	59%
Restrictions to stop children seeing unhealthy food and drink adverts	74%	79%	65%

Support for policies to tackle wider social determinants of health¹

Policy	2024 Labour voters who voted Conservative in 2019	Labour 2024 voters open to Reform	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%	73%	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%	70%	63%
Requiring employers to offer flexible working practices to improve employee health	88%	76%	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%	79%	64%

Greater government investment in community infrastructure e.g. youth centres, leisure facilities	85%	80%	75%
Higher housing standards for landlords to ensure better living conditions for tenants	88%	81%	80%
More government investment into early childhood development programmes like Sure Start or family hubs to support families	73%	81%	70%
Free school meals for all children in state-funded schools	75%	75%	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	43%	50%	44%

When asked to pick their top three priorities on public health, individuals who are open to voting for Labour chose inadequate mental health support (50%) mould and damp in homes (45%), and access to nutritious food (42%).

3. What Works: Messaging and Framing

- Polling and focus-groups conducted for this research gives some insight into how public health interventions can be framed to elected Labour 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, investment in health being good for the economy.**

Messaging principles for discussing public health with Labour voters and politicians

Digging deeper into the messaging that works on public health, we found that:

- **Health messages were more effective when they were anchored in people's daily reality, not abstract policy language:**
 - o 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.
 - o 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 recognise a link between health and the economy, but messages are most effectively framed in terms of day-to-day cost of living pressures and impacts on work, not more abstract measures such as economic growth or productivity.**

- o Focus group participants felt that discussions on economic growth and productivity were ‘impersonal’ but drew explicit links between health and work. Where health intervention was linked to keeping people in work or making them more effective at work, it was seen as especially popular. This was especially true among voters who had previously voted Conservative or were open to voting Reform in a future election.
- **Reducing pressures on the NHS came out as a key reason for improving public health**
 - o Reducing pressure on NHS services and freeing up health resources to deal with unavoidable rather than avoidable illness was the main reason cited to improve public health. This was especially true among voters open to Reform.
 - o Voters directly linked long waits for health services to poor population health.
- **Fairness and ‘levelling the playing field’ were core concerns for Reform open voters**
 - o Focus groups revealed a widespread sense of unfairness that big businesses (particularly in food, drink, and tech) profit from promoting unhealthy habits while individuals are left to pick up the cost. This contributed to a feeling that people were being ‘stitched up’ by corporate actors, and that the government was doing too little to intervene. This same logic also applied to employers and landlords - focus group participants argued that the government had a duty to intervene to level an unfair playing field. This framing was especially persuasive among voters open to Reform.

4. Summary

Labour voters (including those who previously voted Conservative and those who are now open to voting for Reform) tend to value government intervention on health and are more distrustful of businesses than other voter segments. They are also highly supportive of specific policies – providing Labour politicians with a strong mandate for comprehensive action on public health to appeal to a broad section of potential voters

When discussing health with Labour voters and politicians, to mobilise support for action emphasise how public health interventions protect the NHS (without stigmatising individuals) and ease pressure on services, while showing that investing in health supports the economy and helps people live their daily lives.

Our research suggests that using concrete, relatable language that connects health to everyday realities like working, caring for family, and affording essentials, avoiding abstract policy terms or distant economic measures like ‘productivity’ is more likely to be effective.

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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