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Voters' Verdict on Health: What do Reform voters think about the role of government and businesses in shaping the nation's health?

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This briefing provides insights into the views of Reform's voter coalition on the role of government and businesses in shaping and improving the nation's health, particularly focussing on preventing poor health caused by tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy diets. This includes the voters Reform has gained from Labour and from the Conservatives since the 2024 general election.

Ten 75-minute online focus groups were held between 1 and 10 June 2026 with different voter groups. Groups were defined by current voting intention and voting history. This briefing draws on the groups held with Reform's key voter groups: people who intend to vote Reform and voted Labour in 2024 (Labour switchers), and people who intend to vote Reform and voted Conservative in 2024 (Conservative switchers). The focus groups were supplemented with a short online survey on key issues discussed by the groups.

Summary

Reform voters are more supportive of action to improve people's health than political assumptions suggest. Support extends across both groups the party has gained since 2024, from Labour and from the Conservatives. Reform voters value personal responsibility, but they do not see health as a purely individual matter. They think long hours, financial insecurity, stress, the cost of living and the way unhealthy products are marketed all shape people's health, and that support services are hard to reach for those who need them.

Reform voters' support for intervention depends less on ideological attitudes towards the state and more on whether a policy is practical, fair and will actually work. Confidence that a measure will be enforced is the key driver of support. Interventions win backing when they protect children, help people make healthier choices and target those causing or profiting from harm.

There is deep distrust of large corporations across both groups. Reform voters think food, alcohol and tobacco companies put profit before health, use misleading marketing to blur the line between healthy and unhealthy products and exploit loopholes, and they do not want these companies influencing government policy. Framing action on health as holding powerful corporations to account, with messages carried by trusted independent voices rather than politicians, resonates strongly with Reform voters.

When asked if they are concerned about the impact of industries on children's health, Reform voters show lower levels of concern than other groups, though more than half are concerned about the tobacco and food industries. 56% are concerned about the tobacco industry (national average of 63%), 50% the alcohol industry (national average of 58%) and 58% the food industry (national average 65%).

48% of Reform voters want to see similar rules that limit the tobacco industry's contact with government, applied to alcohol and unhealthy food and drink companies, compared to 39% who think the rules should stay as they are now.

Views of Reform voters

1. **Reform voters believe in personal responsibility, but think people need support to stay healthy**

Reform voters think individuals should take responsibility for their health, that information about health risks is widely available, and that people should not expect the government to solve every problem. But they also see responsibility as shared with government and business. They think support services are hard to access, mental health services in particular, that unhealthy products are heavily marketed, and that economic pressures shape people's choices.

> ***"I was just going to say, well, I think you need to really help yourself. I know all the information's out there, isn't it? We're bombarded with it constantly about what's good for you, what's not. So it's all out there and most people are able to use the internet or whatever for what reason. Sometimes they give you bad information and everything, but I think it's all there."*** **– Male, 40s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

> ***"I agree it's absolutely a shared responsibility. It's their responsibility. It's ours as well for what we choose to do and then also governments in terms of the laws and regulations and things like that. So I don't think it's just one person's responsibility. I think it's definitely shared."*** **– Female, 30s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

> ***"I think they've got a partial responsibility as much as we've got our own responsibility"*** **– Male, 60s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

2. **Reform voters see modern life itself as unhealthy, and are more focused than other voter groups on how the way people live and work affects their health**

Reform voters think long working hours, financial insecurity, stress, a culture of convenience, ultra-processed food and declining living standards have a significant impact on people's health. They intuitively understand the link between the pressures of everyday life and the nation's health.

> ***"I think if you want to drill down to it, you could go quite deep because even just looking at a working culture as well, a lot of people have nine to fives, a lot of people work jobs where they work maybe 12 hours, 60 hours a week or 12 hours a day, sorry. And the kind of toll that takes on the body..."*** **– Male, 30s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

There are strong views that economic pressure shapes health, with participants repeatedly describing health through the lens of financial insecurity: household budgets, rising prices, the cost of living and inflation. Reform voters want action to improve health to go hand in hand with action to tackle the cost of living and improve day-to-day living standards.

> ***"This is a very stressful way of living…people are under a lot of pressure all the time, I think."*** **– Male, 40s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

> ***"The cost of living crisis at the moment is causing people not to eat properly actually because things are just too expensive. And when you've got a busy work, I mean, mothers now have to go out to work, the father has to go out to work...Parents just don't have the time to or even maybe afford nutritious food."*** **– Male, 30s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

> ***"I think people are struggling and I think things like the costs of food prices and things are affecting people's diets."*** **– Female, 30s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

3. Reform voters distrust large corporations to put people's health before profit

Reform voters think businesses prioritise profit over health, deliberately shape unhealthy behaviour, exploit loopholes in legislation, use misleading advertising and cannot be trusted to act voluntarily in the public interest. Voters pointed to unhealthy food marketing, misleading health claims such as 'protein' labels on sugary products, and advertising aimed at children through social media, streaming and mobile phones as well as television. Many felt that businesses actively blur the distinction between healthy and unhealthy products in order to maximise sales, and that the marketing budgets behind unhealthy products dwarf anything promoting healthy eating. This distrust extended beyond individual companies to wider concerns about corporate influence on politics and policymaking.

> ***"I think much of the time you're given wrong information just for sales of products and so companies know how to advertise and create something that's going to make people want it. So they think it's making them healthier and they're making the right choices when actually they're not. It's just replacing one thing for another that you actually know better off with."*** **– Female, 40s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

> ***"They're just interested in how much profit they can make irrespective of the impact that's going to have long-term on the national health."*** **– Female, 50s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

> ***"A lot of companies are making money off putting protein on things like protein wraps, protein yoghurt. If you actually look on the back of them, there's not much difference in either of them, but they put protein on it. They put another pound on it and then you buy it because you think it's healthy and it's not."*** **– Female, 30s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

> ***"They're going to jump through every single loophole all the way until they push the product to sell. It's all about the money, isn't it?"*** **– Male, 40s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

> ***"With tools like Instagram, you get lots of ads on there or YouTube. So even if you are not the kind of person that would ordinarily go out and eat junk food, it comes to you whether you want it to or not."*** **– Male, 40s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

> ***"Pushing a more positive message than the negative message that we see over these multi-million pound marketing campaigns by these big corporations, i.e. McDonald's"*** **– Male, 30s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

Reform voters do not want these companies at the table when health policy is made. They assumed corporate lobbying already shapes government decisions and were highly sensitive to vested interests and conflicts of interest. In their view, anyone who stands to profit from a decision should not be advising on it.

> ***"I think lobbyists for big corporations, they absolutely should not be able to influence it, but obviously they pay enough money through backhanded deals that they get listened to."*** **– Male, 30s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

> ***"I think it needs to be people that have perhaps had health conditions or know about it rather than making decisions and giving advice on something they don't know anything about."*** **– Female, 40s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

> ***"Amongst them, there are businesses who are part of the wider group with these big businesses in the UK and the supermarket chain. So they're all part of it together when deciding and consulting the government. So they have a big say"*** **– Female, 40s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

Instead, Reform voters trust scientists, doctors, frontline health professionals and independent public communicators, including well-known figures from sport and the media, to speak on health. Participants wanted decisions to be based on evidence but were highly sensitive to concerns about vested interests and conflicts of interest. Framing that leans on the voices of trusted independent communicators, experts and frontline professionals is more likely to connect with Reform voters.

> ***"There should be a more science-based approach"*** **– Male, 40s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

> ***"Anybody that's in the public eye as well, anybody sort of famous or wherever they are, even sports personalities and people like that who are going to have that influence over people and they could collaborate with companies and things and give off the positive message"*** **– Female, 50s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

4. Reform voters support interventions that work, and judge policies on whether they will be enforced in practice

Reform voters are not opposed to government intervention on health, and opposition to specific policies was rarely ideological. Participants were less supportive of interventions they believed would be ineffective, regardless of whether they supported the underlying objective. This was particularly evident in discussions of smoking policy.

Reform voters supported reducing smoking but doubted whether restrictions would actually stop young people getting hold of tobacco. The strongest criticism of interventions was not that they interfered with freedom, but that they risked being symbolic rather than practical. Several pointed to the ban on smoking in pubs as an intervention that worked. Framing that focuses on enforcement and includes practical information for the public is more likely to connect with Reform voters. Participants' reactions to the Smokefree Generation policy (the generational phase out of legally buying tobacco) and to restrictions on unhealthy food advertising illustrate the point.

> ***"I think it's a good idea in theory and I think it does show that the government is trying to do something and I'm not sure what else they could have done really, but whether it'll stop is a different thing."*** **– Female, 40s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

> ***"I think this is a healthy level of the government intervention that we're talking about where we're not completely ruling it out, but we're just saying that there's some measures in place that it's post 9:00 PM for certain things I think and then just the market research to look into the effects that maybe it's having over a period of time. I think this is the type of incremental kind of strategy that should be put forward."*** **– Male, 30s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

> ***"They did the sugar taxes, they allegedly did the chocolate, they did all the smoking, whereas you can't smoke in pubs and things like that. And that actually was really, really good because it was nice to go into a pub where it's not filled with smoke."*** **– Female, 60s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

> ***"I think there is a middle ground where you don't regulate, but you produce advice and share that and that's generally making people more aware...I think regulating is really good when things are really horrible, for example, like smoking, we know that's terrible, but that had to happen at some point."*** **– Female, 40s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

5. Children provide the strongest case for government action on health

Children are seen as the strongest justification for government action. Across both groups of Reform voters, interventions aimed at children attracted significantly stronger support than interventions targeting adults. Reform voters told us they support health education in schools,

restrictions on advertising aimed at children, helping children develop healthy habits, preventing youth smoking and protecting young people from harmful commercial influences. Reform voters broadly agree that the government has a legitimate role in protecting children, even where they are more cautious about regulating adult behaviour.

> ***"I think we talk about education to the younger generation is like what we've sort of been saying constantly throughout here. So I think it starts with that, doesn't it, in terms of the children and then their education needs to continue as they get older."*** **– Female, 30s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

> ***"I also wanted to say awareness and education and I'm not sure how much this has drummed into schooling and getting to kids from a younger age and actually teaching them of the implications of eating Kentucky fried chicken and things like that. Because everyone knows it's obviously cheaper to eat fast food, which is fast and quick, but so do these kids, our kids taught this in schools. I don't know."*** **– Male, 40s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

> ***"Like what the government's saying with Instagram, with the under 16s, that's what they're working on at the moment with all these children. So they should have that with health as well."*** **– Female, 60s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

How Reform voters responded to public health policy ideas

We showed participants three public health policies to understand the considerations that shape their views. Reform voters judged them on effectiveness and fairness; whether they would work in practice and whether they imposed costs on people who were not causing harm. Participants frequently distinguished between responsible consumers, people experiencing addiction, children and large corporations. Interventions were most popular when they targeted those causing or profiting from harm, rather than imposing burdens on everyone.

Smokefree Generation

Reform voters' responses to the Smokefree Generation policy were varied. Conservative switchers in Thurrock were generally supportive because it protects children without affecting existing smokers, while Labour switchers in Ashfield were noticeably more sceptical, often arguing that people would simply find ways around the restrictions. Across both groups, participants worried that smoking restrictions would push young people towards vaping, and wanted to see the law enforced against shops that sell to underage customers. Framing that demonstrates the benefits of vapes as a stop smoking aid for adults, or additional measures alongside the policy specifically on vaping for children, would appeal to Reform voters.

> ***"So as a smoker, I think this is a really good law because I think this is probably what we needed sometime back. I think we're all aware that there's no point in sticking on the tobacco packets like, 'Oh, smoking kills or it has X and Y chemicals because if you are addicted to it, you don't really care."*** **– Female, 40s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

> ***"I think it is a joke, but I think we've got to try things. We've got to keep trying to move things forward...It's okay changing the policies, but they've got to make sure that the law backs that up as well."*** **– Female, 50s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

Minimum unit pricing for alcohol

Reform voters have mixed views on minimum unit pricing. Voters understood the rationale, and several liked that it targets cheap, strong alcohol bought in bulk from supermarkets while leaving pubs and restaurants untouched. Others questioned whether it would change the behaviour of people with serious alcohol dependency, arguing that dependent drinkers would continue regardless of price. Support tended to increase when participants thought about preventing future harm rather than changing current addiction. Framing around preventing future harm, and reassurance that moderate drinkers will not bear the cost, will connect with Reform voters.

> ***"I think it's a positive step. I think particularly, like I say, the sales of shop bought alcohol and the ease and access of it is frightening and we all like to have a drink, but the impact it's having on the health of the nation, I think it needs to be addressed. So I think it's a good way to go"*** **– Female, 50s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

> ***"I do think it's a good idea as in it'll stop people buying the strongest, like the cheapest, strongest they can get."*** **– Female, 40s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

> ***"I think it's a good step in the right direction. I also like the fact that it's not for drinks related in bars or restaurants...I think you're more likely to buy in bulk when it comes to going to supermarkets, et cetera. So I think that's wise as well."*** **– Male, 30s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

Restrictions on unhealthy food advertising

Restrictions on unhealthy food advertising enjoy strong support among Reform voters, who felt they would help children, support parents and reduce children's exposure to unhealthy products. Participants thought young people are increasingly influenced through social media and online content, and so support depends on the restrictions reaching the platforms children actually use.

> ***"I think it's a positive deterrent, so it's definitely a good start, but the bit about brand adverts are still going to be visible in bus stops and places where children would see them. So obviously it's not a perfect solution, but yeah, it's a start."*** **– Female, 40s, Thurrock, Conservative switcher**

> ***"I think it's good because children are influenced by advertising and what they see. So if they're not seeing it, as if they're not seeing the burgers and the sweets and the specific thing, then they won't want it because they won't know about it. So I do think it will help."*** **– Female, 40s, Ashfield, Labour switcher**

There are clear messaging implications for Reform voters

Reform voters link health to everyday life, so using relatable language is likely to be more effective in gaining their support. For Reform voters, messages about stress, cost of living pressures, family life and access to support services resonated more strongly than abstract discussions about population health.

Reform voters care about practical outcomes more than ideology when it comes to health. Reform voters respond more positively to evidence that a policy will work and will be enforced than to abstract arguments about public health.

Reform voters want to protect children, not control adults. Child-focused interventions consistently attracted support, while interventions perceived as restricting adult choice prompted more complex discussion.

Reform voters believe people need support but must take responsibility for their health. Participants strongly value personal responsibility but also recognise that people need practical support to make healthier choices.

Reform voters want corporate influence to be challenged. There is significant distrust of large corporations and strong support for holding businesses accountable for the impact of their products and for keeping them out of policymaking. Messaging with this framing will connect with Reform voters.

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