

# An Open Letter to the next UK Government

## PathwayToPlay

We, the Association of Play Industries (API), write to you urgently, advocating for significant investment in public playgrounds as part of our **Pathway To Play** campaign. We believe it's crucial to address the pressing issues affecting the health and wellbeing of our nation's children.

To this end, we have created the **#PathwayToPlay** manifesto which underscores the vital role of outdoor play in combating the alarming rise in childhood obesity, poor mental health and sleep problems. Playgrounds are the most frequented spaces for children's outdoor play and so we urge your government to prioritise the following commitments:

1. **Conduct a National Audit:** Undertake a comprehensive national audit of public playgrounds, assessing their quantity, quality and accessibility.
2. **Ensure Long-term Sustainability:** Allocate dedicated government funding for the installation and maintenance of free-to-use community play spaces. Every child deserves access to safe, local, high-quality outdoor play areas.
3. **Increase Physical Activity Levels at School:** Integrate outdoor learning into the National Curriculum and provide funding for school outdoor play spaces and equipment to boost children's physical activity levels.

Outdoor play is as fundamental to children's development as sleep, nutrition and education. However, the current oversight in ensuring dedicated spaces for outdoor play is a glaring gap. The decline in freely accessible outdoor play areas compels children indoors, leading to a sedentary lifestyle and missed developmental opportunities.

The consequences of this shift are dire. Childhood obesity and mental health issues are at record levels, with a significant decrease in children's time spent playing outdoors. Our research highlights a dramatic decline in outdoor play, with playground closures becoming increasingly common due to budget constraints.

Moreover, there's a postcode lottery of play, with unequal access to public play areas across the UK. Families in built-up urban areas and those without gardens rely on public play spaces for outdoor activities, yet many communities are seriously deprived of such facilities. Additionally, inaccessible playgrounds are excluding disabled children from outdoor play, further exacerbating inequality. Scope's research reveals the challenges faced by families with disabled children, emphasising the urgent need for inclusive and accessible playground equipment.

The inactivity epidemic among children demands immediate action. Investment in high-quality, free and local playground provision is essential to encourage outdoor play and combat the adverse effects of excessive screen time.

Public playgrounds are an essential community resource, and despite the public's renewed appreciation for them during and after the pandemic, their role in promoting children's health has been undervalued and overlooked by policymakers. It's time to level up the life chances of all UK children by ensuring access to free, local and high-quality playgrounds for all.

We urge you to prioritise outdoor play as a non-negotiable aspect of childhood development. The return on a relatively modest investment in public playgrounds would be significant and long-term, securing brighter, healthier futures for our children and communities and improving the life chances of millions of children.

**Association of Play Industries**

