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## National evaluation of A Better Start Information sheet

We are a team of independent researchers from NatCen Social Research, Britain's largest independent social research organisation and a registered charity. We would like to ask whether you consent to be included in our evaluation of *A Better Start*. Participation in the evaluation is voluntary – it will not affect your access to services.

### What is A Better Start?

*A Better Start* (ABS, for short) is a programme funded by The National Lottery Community Fund to help babies and young children have the best possible start in life. You have registered to take part in activities that are supported by ABS.

### What is the national evaluation of ABS?

We are carrying out an evaluation to find out whether ABS makes a positive difference to families. Our findings will help inform decisions about what services should be provided. We hope that in the future, more families will receive the support they need.

### Who is carrying out this evaluation?

The National Lottery Community Fund has asked a team of organisations to carry out this evaluation. This leaflet focuses on work that NatCen are doing. There are also four other organisations working on different research activities as part of this evaluation: University of Sussex, RSM Partners, National Children's Bureau, and Research in Practice.

### What am I being asked to consent for?

We would like to request information about you and your children from the National Health Service (NHS), managed by NHS Digital, and the Department for Education (DfE).

If you consent, we will send NHS Digital and DfE the names, gender, dates of birth, postcodes, and NHS numbers of you and your children. This is so that they can look up your information. The ages and gender

of you and your children will be used in the evaluation. The rest of your personal information will be removed from the data before it is sent to us – so your names, NHS number, exact date of birth, and postcode will not appear in this data.

If you choose not to give your consent, your information will not be used in the evaluation. As previously stated, this will not affect whether you can take part in services with your child.

### **Why am I being asked to provide this consent?**

Accessing this data will allow us to understand whether the programmes funded by ABS are helping to improve children's health and development. This will help us understand whether more programmes like ABS should be funded in future, or if anything should be done differently to better support families like yours in future.

### **What information will NatCen request for families who consent?**

The datasets we request will contain the following information (where it relates to you):

- mother's mental health during pregnancy and shortly after delivery
- alcohol use and smoking during pregnancy
- weight and gestational age of babies at birth
- breastfeeding at 6–8 weeks
- child's weight at Reception
- child's development at 2½ (communication and socio-emotional development)
- school readiness at the end of Reception
- whether a child is recorded as being Looked After or a Child In Need
- whether a child has had any Accident and Emergency (A&E) attendances or emergency hospital admissions

We will also request a set of other background information, including ethnicity and any identified disability. This information would not be used to identify you.

We will be asking NHS Digital and DfE to provide the same non-identifiable information for families living in areas that don't have ABS. This will provide us with a comparison group.

Finally, we will also collect some information about which services funded by ABS you have attended in the past. This is so we can learn how often people are attending these services.

### **Where will you get this information from?**

This information is held in datasets managed by NHS-Digital and DfE. The datasets are the Maternity Services Dataset, the Community Services Dataset, the National Child Measurement Programme, the Hospital Episode Statistics, and the National Pupil Dataset.

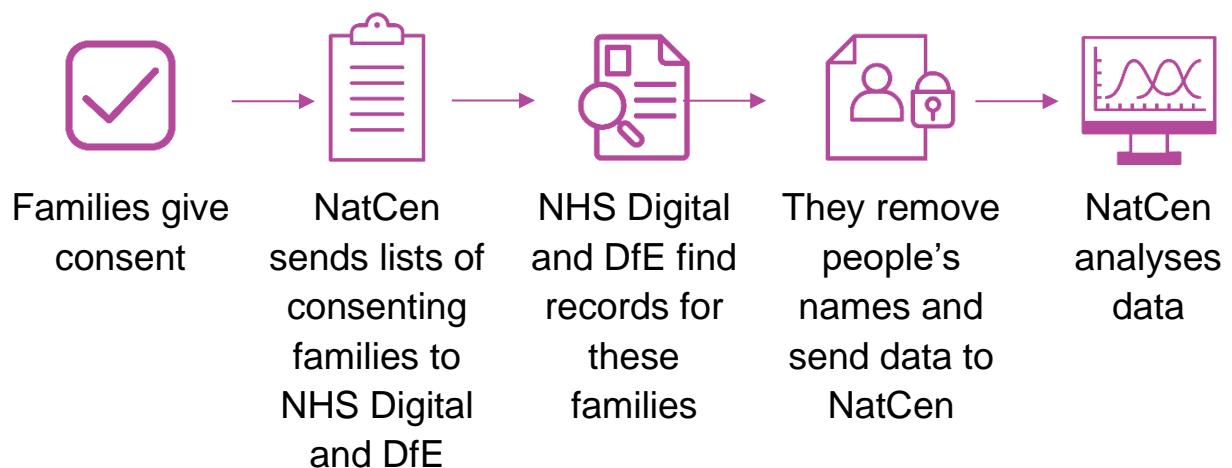
This information is held centrally by NHS Digital and DfE, so we do not need you to tell us any of it yourself. We will not directly access your medical records and we will not speak to any doctors or anyone else. The information we receive will cover the period from June 2022 until June 2024.

### **Will you be able to identify me or my family?**

We will not be able to identify you or your family. The data we receive from NHS Digital and DfE won't contain your names or any information that is unique to your family. We will not link this data back to information that identifies you personally (like your name, postcode or NHS number).

### **What will you do with the information?**

We will compare the average outcomes for families who are part of ABS, with those who live in areas that don't have ABS. We are interested in the general picture, and not in the outcomes of any individual family.



### How will you keep data about my family safe?

NatCen has an established record of handling data securely and safely. At the end of the evaluation we will permanently delete all the data. To find out more you can visit <https://natcen.ac.uk/taking-part/studies-in-field/a-better-start-national-evaluation/about/>

### Is there any risk to me or my children if I give my consent?

As with any study, there is always an extremely small chance that something could go wrong (for example, there could be a cyberattack leading to data being stolen). In practice this is extremely unlikely to occur for this study.

The data we receive will not contain anyone's names, NHS numbers, postcodes or date of birth. This means we will not be able to tell who is who from this data alone. There is a very small risk that if, for example, someone is the only person in their local area with a certain ethnicity, disability and age, it might be possible to identify who they are in this data. However, this is extremely unlikely to be possible as the evaluation team would need to know this individual personally, or look them up in other ways, which the evaluation team will not do.

### Do I have to give my consent?

No, you do not need to consent. Whether or not you consent you can still take part in the same activities and services with your child. If you

choose not to give consent, your information will just be excluded from the evaluation.

What if I change my mind and want to withdraw consent?

You can change your mind any time until June 2024 by contacting The Centre for Early Child Development directly on 01253 476789 or email [betterstart.cecd@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:betterstart.cecd@nspcc.org.uk). After June 2024, we will not be able to process any withdrawals of consent, because we will have already made our requests for data to NHS Digital and DfE.

### **Where can I get more information?**

You can call 0808 281 9513 or email [ABS@natcen.ac.uk](mailto:ABS@natcen.ac.uk) to ask any questions. You can also write to *A Better Start, NatCen Social Research 35 Northampton Square, London, EC1V 0AX.*