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**November 7**

**FRUIT AND VEG ON PRESCRIPTION PILOT LAUNCHED TO TACKLE ILL HEALTH AND FOOD POVERTY**

An innovative pilot, thought to be the UK’s first large-scale “Fruit & Veg on Prescription” project, has been launched to help tackle health inequality and food poverty.

[Alexandra Rose Charity](https://www.alexandrarose.org.uk/), in partnership with public health teams in the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Lambeth, has launched Fruit & Veg on Prescription as part of a £250,000 pilot funded by local authorities and a charitable foundation.

The projects will be delivered in partnership with the Bromley by Bow Centre in Tower Hamlets, one of the earliest pioneers of social prescribing, and by The Beacon Project in Lambeth.

Trials in the boroughs, which both have high rates of chronic disease, will explore the viability of fruit and veg on prescription as a long-term solution to tackling diet-related ill health and food insecurity.

The project launches as food prices continue to soar and fresh food inflation has reached a record 13.3%.

Each person will be prescribed Rose Vouchers for Fruit & Veg and will receive up to £8 per week in vouchers, plus £2 per week for each household member\*.

Participants can spend their Rose Vouchers on the fruit and veg of their choice with local retailers and market traders. In Tower Hamlets, they will also be invited to take part in monthly healthy lifestyle group sessions to improve their understanding of nutrition and health.

Alexandra Rose Charity operates in eight locations across the UK, supporting communities via its Rose Vouchers for Fruit & Veg Projects - these help families on low incomes to buy fresh fruit and veg.

The charity, which has been doing this work since 2014, says diet-related ill health costs the NHS billions each year. Prescribing fruit and veg using a social prescribing approach that considers a person’s whole life situation could prevent premature death and significantly reduce healthcare costs.

“Fruit & Veg on Prescription is an idea whose time has come,” said **Jonathan Pauling,** Chief Executive at Alexandra Rose Charity.

“The cost of living crisis is worsening and exacerbating rising levels of diet-related ill health and food insecurity. When calories from unhealthy food are three times cheaper than healthy alternatives, it makes sense that people will prioritise being full rather than being healthy, but this only stores up problems for the future.

“Diet-related ill health is costing the NHS billions every year, but more importantly, it is limiting the life chances of people on low incomes. We hope that the Fruit & Veg on Prescription Project will make a healthy diet easier to access for people who are struggling.”

**Professor Sir Sam Everington**, a GP in Bromley by Bow, Chair of NHS Tower Hamlets Clinical Commissioning Group, and Vice President of the British Medical Association, said all clinicians should embrace the prescription of fruit and veg.

“So many long and short-term illnesses deteriorate significantly with a poor diet. A healthy diet can often achieve far more than any medicines I can prescribe as a GP.

“Therefore, fruit and veg prescriptions are essential in reversing and preventing many illnesses. When I trained over 40 years ago, Type 2 Diabetes was a disease of the elderly. We are now seeing it in teenagers. Much of it is preventable with a healthy diet and good regular exercise. Fruit and veg should be part of every prescription.”

**Dr Chi-Chi Ekhator,** GP Lead at the Beacon Project and vice-chair of the Ascension Trust, said: “Fruit and Veg on prescription is absolutely key to tackling health inequalities in many vulnerable communities. As a GP, I continue to hear more and more from patients who have to make choices such as eating or heating as they grapple with the economic climate.

“Moreover, some are forced to forgo looking after their chronic diseases in the face of rising costs. It is not surprising that choosing to purchase fruits and vegetables becomes less of a priority. This scheme aims to help those who are most vulnerable achieve better control of their health through lifestyle choices that are evidenced based and will indeed make a huge difference not only to the individual but also to the NHS as a whole.”

During the 12-month pilot, Rose Vouchers for Fruit and Veg will be distributed to a target group of 122 residents across both boroughs who are at risk of, or have, conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes or mental health conditions and are struggling financially.

Tower Hamlets currently has the highest poverty rate (39%), child poverty rate (56%) and income inequality of all London boroughs, while Lambeth also has a high rate of chronic disease and health inequality.

When the pilot is evaluated, it could be rolled out across the UK subject to funding.

Alexandra Rose Charity has also called for the government to implement the recommendations of the National Food Strategy quickly. The strategy, which has been on hold, recommended a “Community Eatwell” programme which recognised the huge potential role of empowered local communities working with primary care to radically change eating habits and health.

**ENDS**

\*Tower Hamlets £6 per week and Lambeth £8 per week due to additional funding plus £2 per week for each family member.

**IMAGES AND BROADCAST OPPORTUNITY**

Photo caption: *Copyright Alexandra Rose Charity. Photo by Liz Finlayson/Vervate* (except the Brixton Market photo which can just be captioned as so: *Copyright Alexandra Rose Charity*).

*Get in touch with Altitude via the details below to book in and arrange your visit.*

**More about Alexandra Rose Charity**

Founded in 1912 by Queen Alexandra, the Alexandra Rose Charity was established to support Londoners in poverty.

Since the charity began the Rose Vouchers for Fruit & Veg Project eight years ago, an incredible 1.6 million Rose Vouchers have been redeemed by families. They have given thousands of families the spending power to buy the fruit and vegetables of their choice whilst supporting markets, traders and greengrocers around the UK. In the toughest of years, this has been more vital than ever.

Last year, the charity celebrated the redemption of its One Millionth Rose Voucher. Since then, a further 600,000 vouchers have been redeemed as the cost of living crisis has taken hold. The charity plans to support thousands more families as it continues to deliver on its 5-Year Strategic Plan.

**More from the Project Partners**

**Cllr Gulam Choudhury**, Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Social Care at Tower Hamlets Council, said: “The COVID-19 pandemic, and now the cost of living crisis, has exacerbated the underlying issue of food insecurity experienced by many families and residents. This project is part of our Healthy Boroughs Programme, which aims to develop community-led schemes to address challenges around food and nutrition insecurity.”

**Cllr Marcia Cameron**, Lambeth’s joint Cabinet Member for Healthier Communities said: “We are working hard to tackle worsening food poverty and tackle the chronic health conditions which persist in our communities such as heart disease and Type 2 Diabetes. With the cost of living bearing down on household incomes the risk of diet-related ill health and food insecurity have gone up.

“Healthy eating can help address both these issues, which is why we were so determined to lead this new trial. Lambeth is already recognised as the number one borough in London for tackling food poverty and we have lobbied the government to make the right to food a legal requirement.

“This latest initiative shows we will continue to do all we can to keep making progress and lead on this crucial issue.”

**More about Impact on Urban Health**

Charitable foundation Impact on Urban Health is a part of Guy's & St Thomas' Foundation. For over 500 years, Guy’s & St Thomas’ Foundation has been a constant in London’s ever-changing landscape, at the leading edge of health.

Impact on Urban Health address health inequalities by focusing on a few complex health issues that disproportionately impact people living in cities – childhood obesity, multiple long-term conditions, the health effects of air pollution, and children’s mental health.

Their programmes are long-term and formed of partnerships at local, borough, national and international scales.

**Rebecca Sunter,** Programme Director, said: “We are pleased to support the ‘Fruit & Veg on Prescription’ pilot in partnership with Lambeth Council and Alexandra Rose Charity.  Through our work at Impact on Urban Health we are supporting a variety of projects to help families and children in lower income neighbourhoods access the things they need to be healthy.

“This one-year pilot will enable us to learn how feasible and effective this new social prescribing model could be. We are particularly excited to be supporting community-based health professionals to help target families who do not traditionally access mainstream health services. We will be sharing our findings to help build the evidence base to show how a fruit and vegetable prescribing model can work in response to the National Food Strategy.”

**This news release has been prepared by Altitude**

[Altitude](http://www.altitudepr.co.uk) is a public relations consultancy based in South Yorkshire.

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