

# Lothian scheme boosts uptake of food and vitamin vouchers for families living in poverty

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An improvement project in Lothian is boosting uptake of food and vitamin vouchers for low income pregnant women in the area.

The scheme has seen a 13% rise in eligible women receiving [vouchers](#) in Lothian compared with an 8% decline for the rest of Scotland.

The full results are published in *BMJ Quality Improvement Reports* today - an open access forum to help clinicians share improvement ideas.

Healthy Start is a UK wide [food](#) and vitamin voucher scheme for low income pregnant women and families. But across the UK, at least 25% of eligible women and children miss out on vouchers, and that figure has remained static for many years.

So a team at NHS Lothian set out to increase uptake receiving vouchers in the area by December 2015. Using an improvement model, they identified ways to improve documentation, sign up, and referral.

Comparing average figures for January-June 2014 and March-August 2015, there was a 13.3% rise in voucher receipt in Lothian (increase from 313 to 355 women), versus an 8.4% decline for the rest of Scotland (fall from 1688 to 1546 women).

The scheme has also increased the number of women referred for

welfare rights advice, boosting family budgets by an average of £4,500.

This improvement project "has had a measurable impact on [pregnant women](#) across Lothian," conclude the authors. "Our findings have relevance across the UK, particularly at a time of worsening finances for many families," they add.

The team, led by Graham Mackenzie, a Consultant in Public Health, will present their project at the BMJ/IHI International Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare next week (12-15 April 2016), in Gothenburg, Sweden.

**More information:** Increasing Healthy Start food and vitamin voucher uptake for low income pregnant women, *Quality Improvement Reports*, [qir.bmj.com/lookup/doi/10.1136/quality.u210506.w4243](http://qir.bmj.com/lookup/doi/10.1136/quality.u210506.w4243)

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