

# How the pandemic affected a deprived coastal town

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Lancaster University researchers found increased levels of free school meal eligibility in Fleetwood following the pandemic as part of a study of the town, which has high levels of deprivation.

The research identified emerging [food insecurity](#) in areas of Fleetwood with better housing and income, but higher health and disability deprivation.

Lancaster University has been working with the [local community](#) in Fleetwood alongside the [local council](#) and Lancashire County Council to identify the major impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on this coastal population.

The Lancaster Ecology and Epidemiology Group, led by Dr. Luigi Sedda from Lancaster Medical School, identified a sharp increase in free school meal eligibility within the less deprived groups of Fleetwood bringing a [food crisis](#) within an ongoing and intense health crisis.

This research has now been published in *BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health*.

Dr. Russ Cain, lead author of this study, said, "We show the community of Fleetwood not only continued to bear the burden of poor health typical of neglected [coastal areas](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic, but those living in areas of better housing and income, who might otherwise be considered immune to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, showed the greatest increase in food insecurity, especially among those with disabilities."

According to the NHS Confederation, the prevention of food insecurity is key to curtailing rising rates of physical and mental health conditions caused by deprivation, hunger and unhealthy diets, with negative impacts upon children and at a hefty and growing cost to the NHS.

Dr. Sedda said, "While Fleetwood experienced the worst of the pandemic effects, its community developed interventions to restore some of its health and socio-[economic indicators](#) providing an example

of resilience for other coastal communities. In fact, this is only due to the strong community spirit and initiative that Fleetwood is lucky to have."

During a crisis all groups are affected, but often not much consideration is given to those groups that are bordering deprivation and that can be catapulted in the most deprived conditions by external crisis. For this reason, [decision makers](#) and Practitioners should include them as at risk groups and provide support and preparedness.

Dr. Maddy French, who co-authored the research, said, "It is important to recognize there is a social gradient to most [health outcomes](#) and design interventions accordingly. Interventions should help those in the most disadvantaged position but also those living precarious and insecure lives who are at risk of sliding into greater material and financial deprivation. Everyone in society benefits when those with the greatest social need are taken care of."

**More information:** Russell Cain et al, Food insecurity, mental health and in-hospital mortality following the COVID-19 pandemic in a socially deprived UK coastal town, *BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjnp-2022-000561](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjnp-2022-000561)

Provided by Lancaster University

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