

# Campaign with us for clean air



Campaigns toolkit for health care professionals

September 2019

## A public health crisis

Air pollution is a serious problem in the UK, and it's linked to tens of thousands of early deaths each year. It's especially harmful to people who are living with a lung condition. Older people, children and babies also have a higher risk of experiencing symptoms and other harmful effects from breathing in polluted air.

From increased risk of an asthma attack, to reduced lung function in children, it's clear that our current levels of air pollution constitute a public health crisis.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

The solutions are available. What we need is politicians to put them in place.

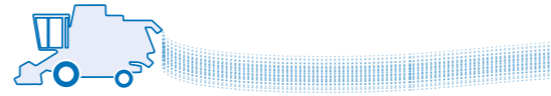
## Make your voice heard

As a health care practitioner, you are a powerful force in your community and beyond. Your first-hand experience is an invaluable tool for demonstrating the scale of this health crisis to politicians. By working together, we can make politicians listen and demand change.

This toolkit will help you. It's been designed to help you feel ready and able to campaign against toxic air.

This pack will answer the following questions:

- What is campaigning?
- How bad is air pollution in the UK?
- How does air pollution affect our health?
- What policy changes are urgently needed?
- What can you do to fight for change?
- What resources are available to help you?
- What health advice should you give to patients?



## What is campaigning?

Campaigning is fighting to change something you care about. There are lots of things you can do in your community or workplace to make a difference. Even the smallest actions can make big changes when we work together.

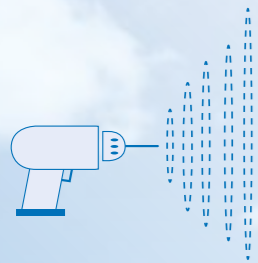
## How bad is air pollution in the UK?

Air pollution in the UK has improved in recent years, but it's still at harmful levels for our health. We've still got a long way to go and have been breaking legal limits on a pollutant known as nitrogen dioxide since 2010.<sup>i</sup>

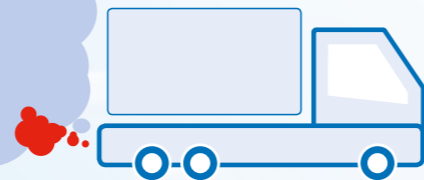
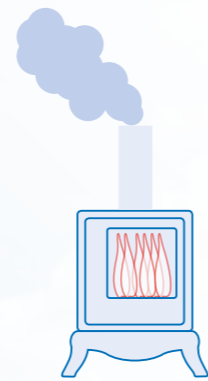
Most of our towns and cities either have areas that breach the legal level and/or areas that have levels of a toxic pollutant, known as particulate matter, over the level that is recommended by the World Health Organization. Our latest research found that there are over 2,000 health centres located in areas with these unsafe levels of particulate matter.<sup>ii</sup>

Vehicle emissions are the biggest culprit - they make up around 80% of the harmful pollution we breathe in at the roadside in urban areas. And we know that older, diesel vehicles tend to produce the most harmful emissions.<sup>iii</sup>

Pollution can also come from other sources like wood burning, construction sites and farming.



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## How does it affect our health?

Anyone can be affected by air pollution. Breathing polluted air throughout our lives can put you at greater risk of developing lung cancer and cardiovascular disease. It can stunt the growth of children's lungs and leave them with lifelong health problems.

If you work with patients that have lung or heart conditions, it's important to know they could be at higher risk and it could potentially trigger an attack. Recent BLF research found a link between high air pollution episodes and a spike in hospital and GP visits for people with respiratory conditions.<sup>iv</sup>

It also disproportionately affects babies in the womb, children and older people.

Additionally, air pollution can worsen existing health inequalities. People living in the poorest areas are often the most exposed to pollution, so exposure to toxic air can reinforce unequal health outcomes for deprived communities. For more information read: *Every breath we take: the lifelong impact of air pollution*, from the Royal College of Physicians and Royal College Paediatrics and Child Health.<sup>v</sup>



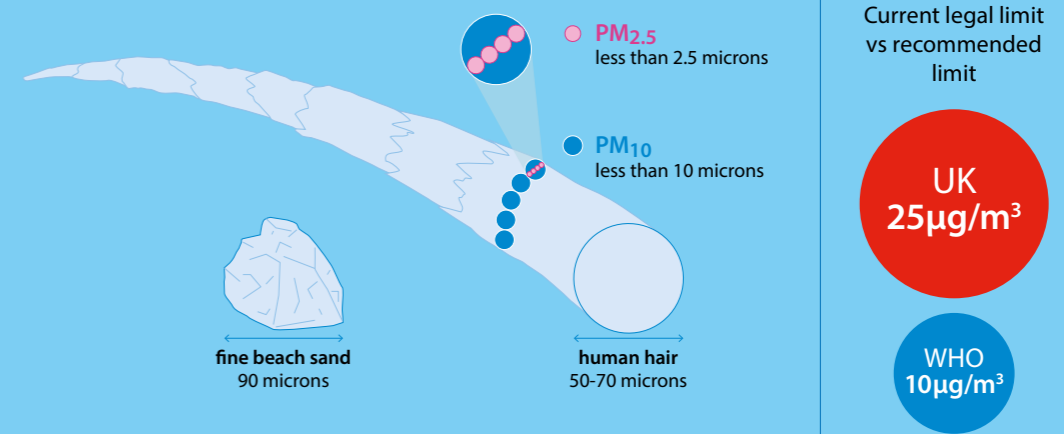
We need a national plan to protect children, older people and lung patients where they live, work and play



People living in the poorest areas are often the most exposed to pollution



## Fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>)



### What is PM<sub>2.5</sub> and where does it come from?

PM<sub>2.5</sub> refers to particles with a diameter smaller than 2.5µm – 30 times smaller than the average human hair. PM<sub>2.5</sub> is particularly harmful as the small particles can easily and quickly penetrate deep into the lungs, and enter the bloodstream.

PM<sub>2.5</sub> can come from a variety of sources including industrial, commercial and residential emissions, transport, and agriculture. However, the biggest contributor to urban pollution hotspots remains road transport.

### What are the health effects?

Exposure to PM<sub>2.5</sub> has been linked to a plethora of poor health outcomes from diseases including asthma, COPD, coronary heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer, with emerging evidence showing impacts on low birth weight, diabetes and neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

### What is the current situation?

The UK is currently meeting legal limits for PM<sub>2.5</sub>. However, this is only because our legal limit is more lenient than the limit recommended by the international health community. Indeed, the UK legal limit for PM<sub>2.5</sub>, which is derived from EU regulation, is more than twice as high as the WHO recommendation – 25µg/m<sup>3</sup> instead of 10 µg/m<sup>3</sup> for the annual average. PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels have decreased over recent years, but they haven't dropped fast enough, and scientists have not been able to identify a level of PM<sub>2.5</sub> that is harmless to breathe. As such, the WHO advocates an annual limit of 10µg/m<sup>3</sup> as a starting point to encourage progressive reductions. **Given there is no safe level, the objective should be to aim for levels as low as possible, and to achieve the WHO's limits at the earliest possible time.**

# What policy changes are urgently needed?

## 1) New world-leading clean air laws that protect our health

We are expecting the publication of a new Environment Bill in 2019. This legislation will set out how environmental issues are governed as the UK leaves the European Union and is a major opportunity to make world-leading changes. We need:

- ▶ New legal limits for particulate matter that are in line with those recommended by the WHO and a commitment to meet these by 2030.

## 2) An ambitious Clean Air Strategy that puts vulnerable people at the centre

The government published their Clean Air Strategy in January 2019. This was a welcome step, but it lacked the ambition that this public health crisis demands and left much more to be done.<sup>vi</sup> We need:

- ▶ A national plan to protect children, older people and lung patients where they live, work and play. This urgently needs to include changes to the way people can access data and protect their health, a UK-public health campaign, as well as targeted public health funding.

## 3) A network of clean air zones that lowers pollution as quickly as possible

After the government lost a number of court cases due to illegal levels of nitrogen dioxide across the country, local authorities have been ordered by government to establish clean air zones to tackle the problem. These zones are the best and quickest way to bring pollution down, but they have to be implemented effectively. To make that happen we need:

- ▶ Local areas to design ambitious clean air zones that charge the most polluting vehicles from entering town and city centres. They should also be designed to make sure they include hospitals, care homes and schools, to protect the most vulnerable. With dedicated funding put towards cleaner transport alternatives – cycling, walking and public transport.



## What can you do to fight for change?

Knowing where to start with campaigning can seem daunting, but the key thing to do is to focus on what you're trying to change. From there, you can work out the things you can do to get the changes you want.

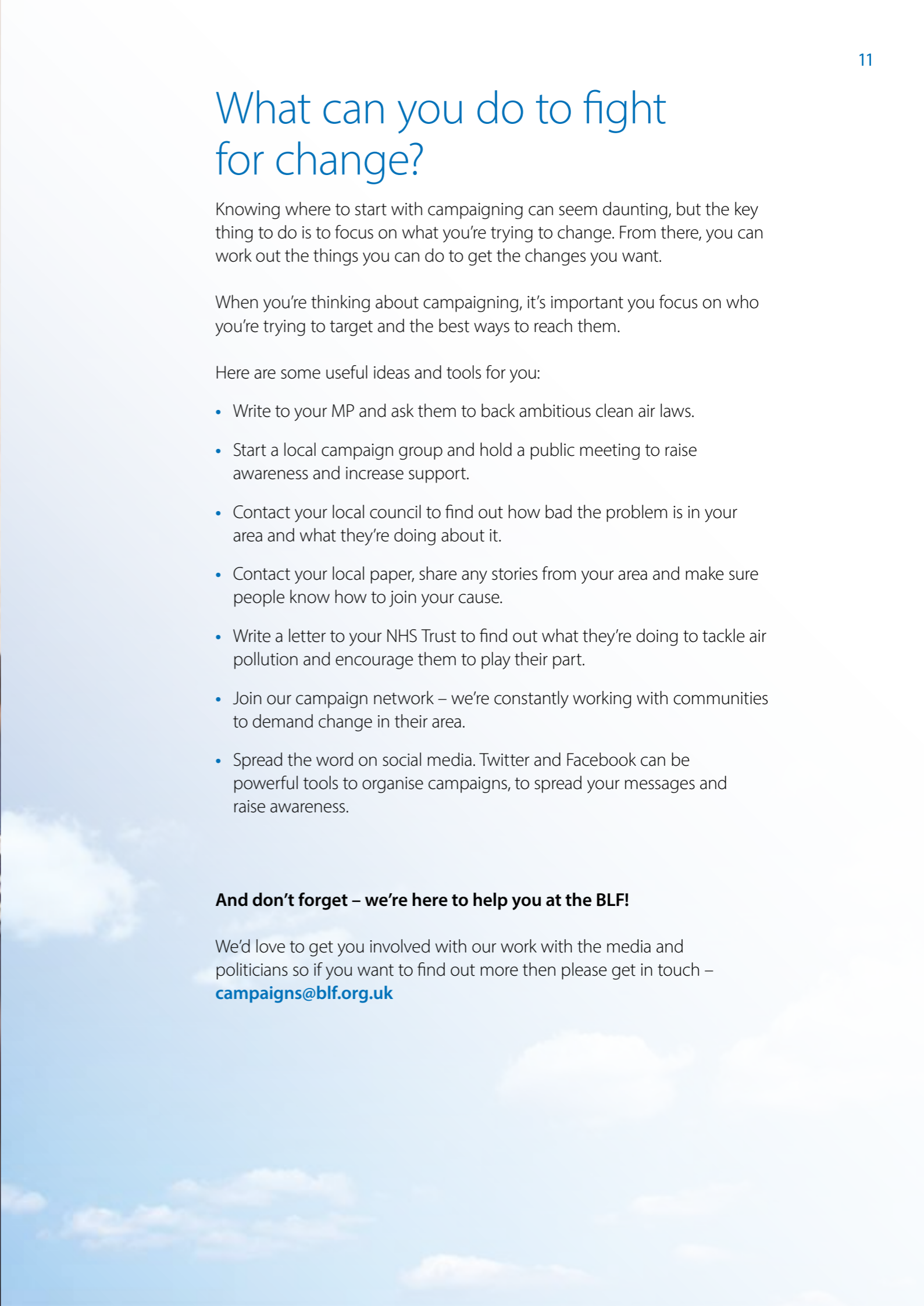
When you're thinking about campaigning, it's important you focus on who you're trying to target and the best ways to reach them.

Here are some useful ideas and tools for you:

- Write to your MP and ask them to back ambitious clean air laws.
- Start a local campaign group and hold a public meeting to raise awareness and increase support.
- Contact your local council to find out how bad the problem is in your area and what they're doing about it.
- Contact your local paper, share any stories from your area and make sure people know how to join your cause.
- Write a letter to your NHS Trust to find out what they're doing to tackle air pollution and encourage them to play their part.
- Join our campaign network – we're constantly working with communities to demand change in their area.
- Spread the word on social media. Twitter and Facebook can be powerful tools to organise campaigns, to spread your messages and raise awareness.

**And don't forget – we're here to help you at the BLF!**

We'd love to get you involved with our work with the media and politicians so if you want to find out more then please get in touch – [campaigns@blf.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@blf.org.uk)



## What resources are available to help you?

Check out our clean air champions hub for a range of tools, including useful templates, information sheets and campaigning materials:

[blf.org.uk/take-action/campaign/clean-air/clean-air-champions](https://blf.org.uk/take-action/campaign/clean-air/clean-air-champions)

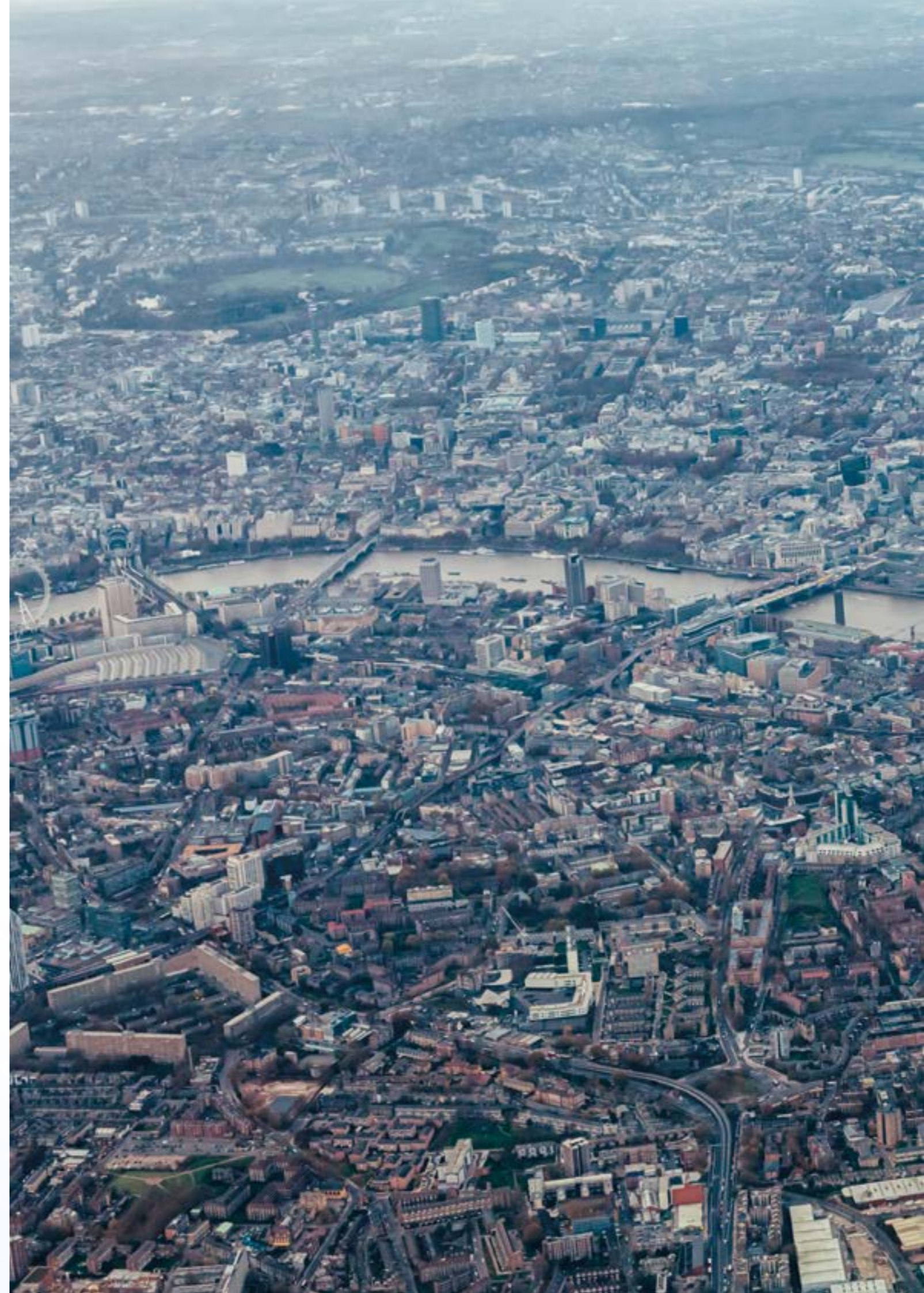
- Read more about air pollution in hospitals on our website with our latest report - *Toxic air at the door of the NHS*.
- Sign up to the **Clean Air Parents' Network** and find out what's going on in your area.<sup>viii</sup>
- Use online petition platforms, such as **38 degrees.org.uk** and **Change.org**, to demand change from national and local politicians.
- You can find your MP's contact details on **parliament.uk**<sup>x</sup> here and your councillors' at **gov.uk**.<sup>x</sup>
- The NICE guidelines on outdoor air pollution set out recommendations for health care professionals.<sup>xi</sup>
- You can find out about air pollution levels in your local area on UK-air. **defra.gov.uk**.<sup>xii</sup>
- You can find the latest evidence-based health advice and guidance for your patients on the British Lung Foundation's website.<sup>xiii</sup>
- You can find out what your hospital can do to play its part from the Clean air hospital framework, developed by Great Ormond Street Hospital and Global Action Plan.<sup>xiv</sup>



## We'd love to hear from you

Get in touch to tell us about the campaigning you've been doing or ask us if you need any advice. Email [campaigns@blf.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@blf.org.uk) for more information.

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- <sup>i</sup> British Lung Foundation (2019) Types of air pollution, [blf.org.uk/support-for-you/air-pollution/types](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/air-pollution/types)
  - <sup>ii</sup> British Lung Foundation (2018) Toxic air at the door of the NHS [blf.org.uk/take-action/campaign/nhs-toxic-air-report](https://www.blf.org.uk/take-action/campaign/nhs-toxic-air-report)
  - <sup>iii</sup> DEFRA (2017) UK plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations [www.gov.uk/government/publications/air-quality-plan-for-nitrogen-dioxide-no2-in-uk-2017](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/air-quality-plan-for-nitrogen-dioxide-no2-in-uk-2017)
  - <sup>iv</sup> University of Dundee (2019) Air pollution levels linked to 'spikes' in hospital and GP visits [www.dundee.ac.uk/medicine/news/2018/article/air-pollution-levels-linked-to-spikes-in-hospital-and-gp-visits.php](https://www.dundee.ac.uk/medicine/news/2018/article/air-pollution-levels-linked-to-spikes-in-hospital-and-gp-visits.php)
  - <sup>v</sup> RCP and RCPCH (2016) Every breath we take: the lifelong impact of air pollution [www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/every-breath-we-take-lifelong-impact-air-pollution](https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/every-breath-we-take-lifelong-impact-air-pollution)
  - <sup>vi</sup> DEFRA (2019) Clean Air Strategy [www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-air-strategy-2019](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-air-strategy-2019)
  - <sup>vii</sup> British Lung Foundation (2018) Toxic air at the door of the [blf.org.uk/take-action/campaign/nhs-toxic-air-report](https://www.blf.org.uk/take-action/campaign/nhs-toxic-air-report)
  - <sup>viii</sup> Clean Air Parents' Network [www.clientearth.org/clean-air-parents-network/](https://www.clientearth.org/clean-air-parents-network/)
  - <sup>ix</sup> Parliament UK (2019) MPs [www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/](https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/)
  - <sup>x</sup> Gov.uk (2019) Find your local councillors [www.gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors](https://www.gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors)
  - <sup>xi</sup> NICE (2017) Air pollution: outdoor air quality and health [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng70](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng70)
  - <sup>xii</sup> DEFRA (2019) UK-Air [uk-air.defra.gov.uk/forecasting/?day=2#forecast\\_map](https://www.uk-air.defra.gov.uk/forecasting/?day=2#forecast_map)
  - <sup>xiii</sup> British Lung Foundation (2019) How can I protect myself from air pollution? [blf.org.uk/support-for-you/air-pollution/tips](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/air-pollution/tips)
  - <sup>xiv</sup> Global Action Plan (2019) Download the Clean Air Hospital Framework [www.globalactionplan.org.uk/clean-air-hospital-framework/](https://www.globalactionplan.org.uk/clean-air-hospital-framework/)  
[Download-the-clean-air-hospital-framework](#)







At some point in our lives, one in five of us will have a lung disease.  
Millions more are at risk.

We're the only UK charity looking after the nation's lungs.

We offer hope, help and a voice.

Our research finds new ways to prevent, treat and cure lung disease.

Our support gives people who struggle to breathe the skills, knowledge and confidence to take control of their lives.

And together, we're campaigning for clean air and better services.

**One day, everyone will breathe clean air with healthy lungs.  
Only your support can make that happen.**

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