

Rt Hon Yvette Cooper
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London, SW1H 0EU

7th September 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Prevention without barriers: an open letter on health foods, consumer choice and regulation

We are calling on Ministers to review the interpretive guidance on probiotic terminology, bringing UK practice into line with scientific consensus and comparable countries, and to modernise guidance on health communication to allow responsible, evidence-based information to reach the groups most likely to benefit.

Neither ask requires primary legislation. Both would make a practical difference.

The government is right to prioritise prevention. But the regulatory framework governing health foods and supplements is not keeping pace with that ambition. In several areas, guidance and interpretation - not the law itself - is preventing responsible businesses from communicating clearly with consumers who would benefit from that information.

Two examples make this concrete.

- The word "probiotic" is used freely by clinicians and understood by consumers across the country. It is treated as a standard product descriptor in 11 EU countries. In the UK, it is classified as an unauthorised health claim, meaning manufacturers and retailers cannot put it on a label. GPs recommend probiotics. Polling shows that 23% of the public have been recommended to take probiotics by a health care professional. UK businesses cannot say what they are selling.
- Around 70% of iron-deficient adults in the UK are menstruating women. This is well-established science, recognised by public health authorities. Businesses are nonetheless prevented from directing clear, evidence-based information at that group. The women most likely to need that information are the least likely to receive it.

To be clear, the word "probiotic" is used freely by clinicians, understood by consumers, and permitted as a standard descriptor in eleven EU countries. In the UK, businesses cannot put it on a label. At the same time, around 70% of iron-deficient adults are menstruating women - a well-established fact recognised by public health authorities - yet businesses cannot direct clear nutritional information at that group.

When communication barriers like these go unaddressed, pressure does not disappear. It shifts onto GP services, pharmacies and hospitals. That is the opposite of what prevention is supposed to achieve.

The fixes are straightforward, and aligning regulation with evidence and public health ambition would be a straightforward step towards a healthier nation. We urge the government to take it.

Yours sincerely,

See 61 signatories overleaf

Open letter signatories:

Andrew George MP
St Ives

Josh Babarinde MP
Eastbourne

Baroness Ritchie
of Downpatrick

Baroness Golding

Martin Last
Director General, Health Food Manufacturers' Association

Sam Jennings
Chair, UK Industry Working Group on Probiotics

Council for Responsible Nutrition UK

Raj Banwait
Nestle

Robert Taylor
Vitabiotics

Nathan Hillier-Daines
Holland and Barrett

Nick Bennett
ADM Protexin

Gordon Lott
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Scarlet Bulmer
Rubicon Technical

Blanca Perez
Nutrigums Ltd

Jeremy Stephens
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Steve Mann
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Miriam Ferrer
Cambridge Nutraceuticals Ltd

Declan English
Willows Ingredients

Holly Thallon Steenson
Viridian Nutrition

Brigette Flower
Jessup Health

Myles McEntyre
G&G Vitamins

Vicky McIver
Power Health

Sally Lott
Lamberts Healthcare

Kate Rose
Waverlex

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Julie Pasquet

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