

Funding the Future

Article URL

Published: January 12, 2026, 5:18 pm

Rishi Sunak has launched an attack on what he calls 'the sick note culture'. I am, quite frankly, appalled.

Sunak is one of the richest men in the country. He has admitted that his family uses a private GP, let alone private healthcare for more complicated issues.

He is protected by privilege and wealth from the stresses that impact millions of people in the UK.

The possibility that a person might suffer stress as a consequence of their inability to work out where their child's next meal might come from, or how they might keep a roof over their head, or how they might provide childcare when they go to their third job, which they have to take to meet the extraordinary increases in the cost of living imposed upon them by the Bank of England, or that they might be racked with guilt about their simple inability to provide for those about whom they care, is, I am quite certain, beyond his comprehension.

More than that, I doubt that he has even thought about the need to imagine it. In that case, of course he cannot see why those things that he calls the 'ordinary stresses and strains' of life might become, in themselves, totally incapacitating. It takes callousness on a considerable scale for anyone in his position to describe them as such, but that is what he has done.

Worse than that, fourteen years of Tory rule have created the healthcare crisis that we have.

Let's leave aside the underfunding of the NHS, where funds provided have been insufficient to ensure that demand, not least for mental health services, can be met.

Let's also leave aside the deliberate attack on the credibility and work ethic of NHS staff since 2021, in which he has played such a major role. Instead, let me just draw attention to other critical factors.

First, there is Covid. Sunak is a key player in the collective denial of the impact of this disease by his government and its predecessors since Boris Johnson decided to claim

that its impact had effectively ceased from 2021 onwards.

That claim is complete nonsense. Not only do lots of people still get Covid, but it is as debilitating as ever, in many cases significantly threatening health well-being.

Covid is also a major secondary health risk. Increases in related illnesses, and in particular cardiac-related disease, are significant. The government is trying to pretend that none of this is happening.

Nor are they taking necessary action. For example, they are still doing nothing to provide a guarantee of clean air which is a precondition of good health. It could do that. Moreover, it has been shown that if it did so in school classrooms, where the spread of this disease is so easy, not only would we get major healthcare benefits, but the rate of learning amongst children would increase dramatically, improving education performance across the board. But his government does nothing, because it does not care.

Secondly, the age to which people are expected to work is now increasing. I might be in the fortunate position of being in good health and able to work to the capacity that I have delivered for many years at nominal retirement age, but I am well aware that this really is not normal. Vast numbers of people from their 50s onwards struggle with all sorts of well-being issues related to health that reduce their capacity to work, and too many employers know this and refuse to provide opportunity for those of older age.

Third, Sunak's government has done nothing whatsoever to address the crises of diabetes, where the type two variant of this disease is entirely treatable. However, that is only possible if major changes in diet are made. This does, in particular, require dramatic reduction in the intake of sugar among the population as a whole, and a significant reduction in the consumption of ultra-processed foods. There is, nothing that could increase health in this country more than doing that, reducing both obesity related illnesses and type two diabetes hospital admissions as a result. Despite this, and despite the fact that this has been known for a very long time, his government has absolutely refused to address this problem. Instead, his health secretary is actually married to the boss of British Sugar. You could hardly make that up.

Then there is the assault on employment rights that this government encouraged. Its goal of a so-called 'flexible workforce' has been achieved at the cost of an enormous increase in insecurity for the majority of people in the country, who have suffered a reduction in their economic security as a consequence, giving rise to an increase in their stress. This now seems to have transferred into a widespread inability to work, so disabling is it.

There are, I am sure, other factors in play. But, these are sufficient to make it clear that if there is a responsibility for sickness in the UK then that belongs to Rishi Sunak and his predecessors and his colleagues in office since 2010. There is, quite literally, no one

else to blame.