

# Obesity Health Alliance: Joint Policy Position on Childhood Obesity



The above organisations have come together to share their expertise and support Government in tackling the complex issue of overweight and obesity in the UK. We support the long term goal of tackling obesity across the life course. In the first instance, we have agreed on a set of urgent population level policy interventions listed below that we believe will reduce rates of childhood overweight and obesity, and address the social inequality and cultural differences in overweight and obesity prevalence.

We welcome the Government's plans to introduce an ambitious, cross governmental childhood obesity strategy that will deliver a reduction in the number of overweight and obese children in the UK. The strategy will need to include measures that **protect** families from the pressures of unhealthy food marketing, **enable** healthy behaviours by addressing the obesogenic environment, equip people with the **information** needed to make healthier choices, and ensure professional **support** is provided for those who are already overweight or obese to help them achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

The Government should fully utilise all the policy tools at its disposal to deliver an effective strategy, including regulation. Progress must be routinely measured and evaluated to hold all those responsible to account for their progress.

## Protect

Children are a vulnerable audience. Research shows that advertising of unhealthy food and drink can influence children's purchases, consumption and food preferences. Advertising practice on the TV, internet and in retail environments is skewed towards unhealthy products and is inconsistently regulated. In order to protect our children and support parents, the childhood obesity strategy should include the following interventions:

- 1) ***The Government should introduce a ban on advertisements before the 9pm watershed for food and drink products that are high in saturated fat, salt and sugar. Alongside this, regulation governing on-demand services and online advertisements should be tightened to align with broadcast regulations.***
- 2) ***Retailers should be set targets to improve in-store architecture to reduce the display of unhealthy foods in areas such as checkouts and end of aisle displays and increase price promotions of healthier alternative products.***

- 3) ***The Government should take action to reduce the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) by introducing a 20% tax on SSBs. The impact of this tax should be monitored and evaluated annually with revenue raised reinvested in public health promotion.***

### **Enable**

Individual choice is a key element in determining whether an individual maintains a healthy lifestyle. However, the current obesogenic environment is making it difficult for people to make healthy food choices and be physically active in their daily lives. Action is needed across society to ensure that our environments, (e.g. our pre-schools, schools, communities, and workplaces) facilitate and encourage healthier behaviours. To do this the strategy should include the following:

- 4) ***The Government should develop an independent set of incremental reformulation targets for industry, backed by regulation and which are measured and time bound. These targets should address salt, sugar and saturated fat levels. Compliance with these targets should be monitored and non-compliance should be backed by meaningful sanctions.***
- 5) ***The Government should close the loophole exempting academies and free schools from the School Food Standards. Alongside this the Government should ensure the effective implementation of the cooking and nutritional education qualification into the curriculum.***
- 6) ***The Government should commit to ambitious targets and sustained investment in active travel; this should be accompanied by guidance to Directors of Public Health on how to enable active travel at a local level.***
- 7) ***The Government should commit to protecting ring fenced public health grants and future increases to enable local authorities to tackle obesity in their localities.***

### **Inform**

To encourage healthier behaviours it is important that the risks associated with poor diet and physical inactivity are communicated to the public, for example, through public awareness campaigns. This must be presented in a way that is easy to understand by all age groups. Parents and children must also be presented with easy to understand nutritional information of the products they are buying to help them make an informed healthy decision. To empower the population with the information they need the strategy should include:

- 8) ***Alongside continued negotiations at an EU level to ensure the future of the hybrid system of front-of-pack labelling, the Government should approach, not just retailers and manufacturers, but also restaurants and cafes to expand the number of products that feature the hybrid colour-coded front-of-pack nutritional labelling in the UK.***

### **Support**

With around 30% of children in the UK obese or overweight, we need to help more children and families lose weight and maintain a healthy weight. Children's weight should be measured regularly and families need to have timely access to the clinical support they need to reduce their weight in a safe and sustainable manner. Our medical professionals are at

the forefront of interventions to reduce overweight and obesity. They should be equipped with the skills to identify those in need of intervention and have knowledge of the services to which to refer patients. To do this the strategy should include:

- 9) *Training curricula for all health professionals should include the role of nutrition and physical activity and obesity and the impact on health which should be examined. This should be alongside continuing professional development opportunities to skill up on counselling and coaching techniques.***
- 10) *The Government should commit to sustained investment to extend and increase the provision and quality of weight management services for families across the UK.***

We look forward to supporting the Government in the short-term on the drafting and promotion of an ambitious childhood obesity strategy, and in the longer term to tackle overweight and obesity across the life course.