

# Obesity Health Alliance: Joint Policy Position on Obesity

The Obesity Health Alliance (OHA) is a coalition of over 40 leading charities, medical royal colleges and campaign groups working together to share their expertise and support the Government in tackling the complex issue of overweight and obesity in the UK.

OHA members agree on a set of urgent population level policy interventions listed below that we believe will reduce rates of overweight and obesity, and address the social inequality and cultural differences in overweight and obesity prevalence.

While we support the actions outlined in the Government's 2016 Childhood Obesity Plan, we believe further action is needed to deliver the much needed reduction in overweight and obesity across the whole population in the UK.

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

## Protecting children

More than one in five children are overweight or obese in their first year of primary school. This rises to over one in three by the time they leave primary school. 40% of children in England's most deprived areas are overweight or obese, compared to 27% in the most affluent areas.

Every child has the right to a healthy start in life. Research clearly shows that advertising of unhealthy food and drink can influence children's purchases, consumption and food preferences; and advertising and marketing on the TV, internet and in retail environments is skewed towards unhealthy products. Existing regulations from Ofcom and the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) need strengthening and some marketing techniques are not covered by regulation.

In order to protect our children and support parents in raising a healthy generation of children, the Government should address the following areas as soon as possible:

- 1. The Government should close existing loopholes to restrict children's exposure to junk food marketing across all the media they are exposed to. This should include updating current broadcast regulations with a 9pm watershed on advertising of food and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt to protect children during family viewing time and taking action to ensure online restrictions apply to all content watched by children. In addition rules should be extended to cover sponsorship of sports and family attractions and marketing communications in schools.***
- 2. The Government should fully implement the Soft Drinks Industry Levy as soon as possible to reduce the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs). The impact of this levy should be monitored and evaluated annually with revenue raised reinvested in improving public health across the UK.***

## Making healthy choices easier

Our current obesogenic environment is making it difficult for people to make healthy food choices. The retail environment is skewed to unhealthy choices, everyday food is packed with more sugar, saturated fat and salt than we need and over-sized portions are the norm. Adults and children should be presented with easy to understand nutritional information about the products they are buying to help them make an informed healthy decision. To do this the Government must address the following areas:

- 3. The Government should take action to ensure everyday food is healthier by incrementally reducing sugar, saturated fat and salt as well as overall calories. Public Health England should continue their work to set ambitious targets on sugar reduction but the programme should be widened to include salt, saturated fat and overall calories. Compliance with these targets should be monitored and non-compliance should be backed by meaningful sanctions.**
- 4. The Government should act to make healthier choices in the retail environment easier. This should include setting targets to improve in-store architecture to reduce the display of unhealthy foods in areas such as checkouts and end of aisle displays as well as rebalancing promotions to reduce those on unhealthy foods and increase those on healthy food. These targets should be backed by regulation in order to create a level playing field.**
- 5. The Government should seek to protect the UK's use of traffic light nutrition labelling on front-of-packs as part of EU negotiations and future trade deal agreements. The UK Government should also make the front-of-pack labelling system mandatory across all processed foods including the out of home sector to provide a level playing field to both consumers and industry. The Government should explore options on how to communicate free sugar content of foods, as part of this scheme, as well as helping the public understand free sugars.**

## Creating a healthy environment

The wider environment plays an important role in supporting healthy living. Schools are well placed to ensure children both eat and learn about healthy foods and local authorities have a key role to play in shaping a healthy environment. Action is needed across society to ensure that our environments facilitate and encourage healthier behaviours and address the inequalities that drive obesity prevalence among our most deprived communities. To do this the Government must address the following areas:

- 6. The Government should ensure schools promote and facilitate healthy behaviour. They should do this by closing the loophole exempting some academies and free schools from the School Food Standards. Alongside this the Government should ensure the effective implementation of practical cooking skills in school - making sure teachers have the facilities, resources and funding to help every child learn to cook healthy meals.**
- 7. The Government should provide local authorities with the powers and resources needed to take action on obesity. This should include increased and continued investment in public health, investment in active travel, and giving local authorities and communities the**

*flexibility to respond to obesity challenges through increased powers over licensing, planning and shaping the local environment.*

- 8. *Hospitals should ensure that all food served, sold and promoted to staff and visitors in hospitals promotes a healthy balanced diet in line with the Eatwell Guide. This should be mandatory and independently monitored and enforced.***

## **Training and support**

With around 60% of adults and 30% of children in the UK obese or overweight, we need to support more people to lose weight and maintain a healthy weight. Medical professionals play a key role and it is vital they are equipped with the time, skills and resources to identify and support patients. In addition there needs to be sustained and significant investment from Central Government to ensure vital services that monitor and support people are available.

- 9. *The Government should develop, fund and promote, in conjunction with the Royal Colleges, professional associations and specialist charities evidence based training curricula for all health and social care professionals supporting people to live well, across their life course. This includes the identification of overweight and obese individuals the role of nutrition and physical activity and the impact of obesity on health. This should be alongside continuing professional development opportunities to skill up on counselling, care and support planning and coaching techniques.***
- 10. *The Government should commit to increased and continued investment in public health budgets to ensure that people are supported to reduce their weight and the continuation of the National Childhood Measurement Programme. At a local level, Local Authorities should commit to providing and signposting to appropriate weight management services.***

We are committed to working with the Government to implement the current Childhood Obesity Plan and challenging them to take further action to tackle overweight and obesity from cradle to grave.

This Policy Position Statement is supported by all members of the Obesity Health Alliance



**Steering Group**

British Heart Foundation, British Medical Association, Cancer Research UK, Children's Food Campaign, Diabetes UK, Faculty of Public Health, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Royal College of Physicians, UK Health Forum