

## 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 reducing overweight and obesity in the UK.

OHA members have agreed on a set of population level policy interventions listed below that we believe will help address the wider environmental factors that lead to excess bodyweight, as well as the social inequality and cultural differences in overweight and obesity prevalence.

While we support the actions outlined in chapters one and two of the Government's 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 address the obesogenic environment, including regulation. Progress must be routinely measured and evaluated to hold all those responsible to account for their progress.

#### Overarching commitment to reducing obesity

Currently, 64% of adults have a weight classed as overweight or obese and nearly one in three children are above a healthy weight when they leave primary school. Excess weight is associated with physical diseases including Type 2 diabetes, cancer, heart disease and liver disease along with associated mental health problems and low self-esteem. People living with obesity report it having a detrimental impact on all aspects of their well-being, from employment to their social lives and relationships.

Big challenges require bold, central leadership. In order to ensure sustained and decisive action to create a healthy environment we are calling for the following:

- 1. The Government should commit to reducing obesity and supporting everyone to be a healthy weight. The target to halve levels of obesity in children and significantly closing the inequality gap by 2030 should remain a cross-Government priority with consideration given to how obesity can be reduced in adults. All obesity reduction efforts should focus on both prevention and treatment.**

#### Protecting children

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 expansion to cover all marketing techniques.

In order to protect our children and support parents in raising a healthy generation of children:

- 2. The Government should protect children from exposure to advertising for food and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) with 9pm watershed on all media including on TV, radio, online, cinema and digital out of home. HFSS adverts should be restricted from display within 100 metres of schools, nurseries and children's centres and HFSS branded sponsorship banned from schools. The use of brand equity and licensed characters should be banned from being associated with HFSS products.**
- 3. The soft drinks industry levy should be updated to include sugar-sweetened dairy drinks. To incentivise further reformulation the threshold should be lowered and levy rate increased above inflation with revenue raised reinvested in measures to improve public health. The Government should explore widening the levy to other product categories where sugar reduction is not in line with Government targets.**

### Healthier options

Our current obesogenic environment makes it difficult for people to select healthier food options. 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. In order to make it easier for people to select healthier food options:

- 4. The Government should continue their work to ensure everyday food and drinks are healthier by setting ambitious targets for the food industry to incrementally reduce sugar, saturated fat and salt as well as overall calories. This work should be extended to introduce a bold package of measures to reformulate infant food. The Government should explore and set a timeline for sanctions for non-compliance including fines and inclusion of categories into an industry levy.**
- 5. The Government should create healthier retail environments easier by fully implementing comprehensive restrictions on multi-buy and location based promotions on HFSS food and drinks in retail and out of home (OOH) outlets. As a next step, the Government should commission further research into the extent and impact of price reduction promotions in retail outlets and multi-buy promotions in out of home outlets.**
- 6. The Government should support people to make healthier food choices. They should do this by fully implementing mandatory calorie labelling of food and drinks in all out of home outlets with full nutritional information available on request. Colour coded front of pack labelling should be mandatory on all processed food and drinks for all retailers and manufacturers. As part of this scheme, the Government should explore options on how to communicate free sugar content of foods.**

### Creating a healthy environment

The wider environment plays an important role in supporting healthy living. Schools and early years settings 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. In order to ensure that our environments facilitate and encourage healthier behaviours and address the inequalities that drive obesity prevalence among our most deprived communities:

7. **The Government should ensure schools and early years settings promote and facilitate healthy behaviour. They should do this by updating school food standards and ensuring they apply to all state-funded schools and early years settings. Implementation of school food standards and provision of cooking education should be included in the Healthy Schools Rating Scheme, which should be mandatory for all state-funded schools and early years settings and monitored by Ofsted.**
8. **The Government should use the Spending Review to deliver truly sustainable funding for public health, so local authorities have the resources needed to take action on obesity in their area and ensure there are no gaps in access to obesity prevention and treatment services. The Government should clearly prioritise healthy and active environments as part of the planning process giving local authorities and communities the flexibility to respond to obesity challenges through licensing, planning, advertising and shaping the local environment.**
9. **The Government should ensure that all food served, sold and promoted to patients, staff and visitors in hospitals and other NHS premises promotes a healthy balanced diet in line with the Eatwell Guide. This should be achieved via updating the standards as detailed in the NHS long-term plan and mandating the standards with regular monitoring and sanctions for non-compliance.**

### **Training and support**

It is vital that medical professionals are equipped with the time, skills and resources to identify and support people living with obesity. There needs to be sustained and significant investment from Central Government to ensure vital services that monitor and support people are available. In order to support more people to lose weight and maintain a healthy weight:

10. **The Government should ensure all HCPs and early years professionals are adequately supported to make every contact count to discuss obesity and provide support to families. This should be achieved by leading a joined-up approach across all parts of Government and public bodies to ensure that every clinical and health discipline includes evidence-based training on having action-focused conversations about obesity, weight management, nutrition, physical activity, breastfeeding and behaviour change.**

We are committed to working with the Government to implement chapters one and two of the Childhood Obesity Plan and challenging them to take further action to reduce overweight and obesity throughout the life course.

For more information, please contact:

Caroline Cerny, Alliance Lead, [caroline.cerny@obesityhealthalliance.org.uk](mailto:caroline.cerny@obesityhealthalliance.org.uk) / 020 7424 1114

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