

## Queen's Speech 2021: Briefing paper

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The Obesity Health Alliance is a coalition of over 40 health organisations including the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK and medical royal colleges. We are calling for the Government to play a key role in shaping an environment that makes it easier for everyone to be healthy.

*We strongly support Government plans to take forward restrictions on junk food adverts. This shows that the Government is serious about putting our nation's health first by effectively addressing the drivers of obesity. If implemented fully, these landmark policies will stem the flood of unhealthy food and drink adverts, opening up opportunities for more healthier foods to be advertised."*

Currently food and drink marketing on TV and online is dominated by adverts for products high in fat, sugar and salt – not reflecting a healthy way of eating. These new restrictions have the potential to shift the advertising environment towards adverts for healthier foods. This will provide vital protection for children, who are hugely influenced by food advertising, and benefit everyone's health.

To ensure this legislation is as effective as possible it must include the following elements:

### TV

- The proposed watershed on unhealthy food and drink adverts must apply between 5.30am-9pm to all TV channels and all programmes with no exemptions.

### Online

- A total restriction on unhealthy food and drink adverts on digital adverts of all kinds including social media posts and 'influencer' content.

Implementing restrictions for both TV and online is key to a level-playing field and ensuring that the Government's obesity strategy is future-proofed to take into account current trends in digital use and online marketing.

### Why is the Government acting to restrict junk food marketing?

- Children's health is being affected by high levels of obesity. One in three children in England are above a healthy weight when they leave primary school.<sup>1</sup> Children from deprived areas are more than twice as likely to have obesity than their more affluent counterparts<sup>1</sup>. Addressing obesity will support Government ambitions to level up society.
- Children with obesity are five times more likely to become adults with obesity,<sup>2</sup> increasing their risk of developing a range of conditions including type 2 diabetes, cancer, heart and liver disease.
- Rising levels of obesity is stretching the NHS and society with direct costs in excess of £5.1 billion each year and indirect costs (due to lost productivity, unemployment and social welfare) estimated at £27 billion<sup>3</sup>.

### Junk food marketing and the link to obesity

- Food companies spend millions every year on a range of different marketing techniques to help keep junk food in the spotlight - they would not do this if advertising did not work.
- A wealth of evidence shows there is a clear link between food advertising and the food children prefer<sup>4</sup>. Advertising influences what food children eat<sup>5</sup>, how much they eat and leads to them 'pestering' parents to buy unhealthy products<sup>6</sup>.

- Analysis published by Cancer Research UK shows that almost half (47.6%) of all food adverts shown on commercial TV channels in September 2019 were for HFSS products<sup>7</sup>. This rises to almost 60% during the 6pm to 9pm slot – the time slot where children’s viewing peaks.
- Research shows children are exposed to over 15 billion adverts for HFSS products online every year<sup>9</sup>. This exposure is only set to surge with children increasingly spending more time online<sup>8</sup>.
- The policy will only apply to sugary and high calorie foods that contribute the most to children’s sugar and excess calorie intakes, including biscuits, crisps, chocolate and pizza.
- The policy is estimated to lead to health benefits worth £62 million, with social care savings of £49 million<sup>9</sup>.

Obesity and overweight have become the norm in our society. Obesity is a complex issue with many causes, including genetics, but one of the biggest influences is the world we live in. This policy is a part of a package of measures announced in the 2020 Tackling Obesity strategy which outlined bold action to address the multiple drivers of obesity.

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<sup>1</sup>NHS Digital (2019). Health Survey for England. Accessible at: <http://healthsurvey.hscic.gov.uk/data-visualisation/data-visualisation/explore-the-trends/weight.aspx?type=child>

<sup>2</sup>Simmonds M, Llewellyn A, Owen CG, Woolacott N. Predicting adult obesity from childhood obesity: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Obes Rev.* 2016 Feb;17(2):95-107.

<sup>3</sup>McKinsey & Company (2014). Overcoming obesity: An initial economic analysis.

<sup>4</sup>Public Health England (2015). Sugar Reduction: the evidence for action. Accessible at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sugar-reduction-from-evidence-into-action>

<sup>5</sup>Boyland E, Nolan S, Kelly B (2016). Advertising as a cue to consume: a systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of acute exposure to unhealthy food and non-alcoholic beverage advertising on intake in children and adults. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 103(2):519-33.

<sup>6</sup>Hastings, G. (2006). The extent, nature and effects of food promotion to children: a review of the evidence. WHO 16.

<sup>7</sup>Cancer Research UK (2020) Analysis of revenue for ITV1, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky One derived from HFSS TV advertising spots in September 2019. Accessible at: [https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/cruk\\_report\\_on\\_sept19\\_nielsen\\_tv\\_ad\\_analysis\\_-\\_final22july20.pdf](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/cruk_report_on_sept19_nielsen_tv_ad_analysis_-_final22july20.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>House of Lords (2020). Covid-19: Lockdown measures and children’s screen time. Accessible at: <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/covid-19-lockdown-measures-and-childrens-screen-time/>

<sup>9</sup>Department of Health and Social Care/ Department of Culture Media and Sport (2020). Evidence Note. Accessible at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/total-restriction-of-online-advertising-for-products-high-in-fat-sugar-and-salt-hfss/evidence-note>