

Obesity Health Alliance: Recommendations for the Prevention Green Paper

The Obesity Health Alliance (OHA) is a coalition of 44 health focused organisations, including leading charities, medical royal colleges and campaign groups. The goal of the OHA is to prevent obesity-related ill-health by supporting evidence based population level policies to help address the wider environmental factors that lead to excess bodyweight. We welcome the Government's intention to develop a Green Paper on Prevention and look forward to supporting the development and implementation.

The problem

It is not an exaggeration to say that levels of obesity in the UK are at crisis level. 64% of adults currently have a weight classed as overweight or obese¹ and with nearly one in three children above a healthy weight when they leave primary school, the problem is set to escalate.² 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.

However just a one per cent shift in the number of people putting on extra weight each year until 2035, could avoid around 77,000 cases of disease including 45,000 cases of Type 2 diabetes in the year 2035 alone.³ The situation will not change without bold and decisive policies to tackle the wider environmental factors that drive over-consumption and inactivity – transforming the obesogenic environment into a health supporting one.

OHA recommendations

The Green Paper is an opportunity for the Government to recommit to the full and swift implementation of policies outlined in chapters 1 and 2 of the childhood obesity plan as priority. The Government has already taken positive steps to consult on implementing their plans. We now urgently need these policies to be fully implemented with a comprehensive 9pm watershed on adverts for food and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) on TV and online, restrictions on price and location promotions of HFSS products in retail and out of home environments, and mandatory calorie labelling in the out of home sector.

In addition, we want to see the Government go further to progress and expand successful evidence based policies.

¹ NHS Digital. National Childhood Measurement Programme 2017-18: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/national-child-measurement-programme/2017-18-school-year>

² NHS Digital. Health Survey for England 2017: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/health-survey-for-england/2017>

³ Cancer Research UK and UK Health Forum (2016). Tipping the Scales: why preventing obesity makes economic sense. https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/tipping_the_scales_-_cruk_full_report11.pdf

1. Restricting junk food marketing to children:

There is a wealth of evidence proving that junk food advertising influences children's food preferences and how much they eat. We want to see further action to significantly reduce children's exposure to junk food advertising by closing loopholes that allow food companies to promote their unhealthy products to children. In particular:

- Extension of the proposed 9pm watershed to all audio-visual advertising, including radio, cinema and digital out of home adverts. Our detailed position on this policy is available [here](#).
- Banning the use of child-friendly brand equity and licensed characters from packaging of HFSS food and drink products.

2. Reformulation of sugary food and drinks:

Structured reformulation programmes and policies have been effective at reducing salt from everyday food and sugar from soft drinks in recent years. There is now potential for the Government go further to strengthen and expand current reformulation efforts:

- Commit to a timeline and specific mandatory and fiscal measures for the food industry if they fail to meet Government targets to reduce sugar and calories from their products.
- Expanding the soft drinks industry levy (SDIL) to include milk based sugary drinks with more than 5% added sugar. We also want to see the current lower SDIL threshold lowered to incentivise further reformulation, and the levy rate to increase above inflation with additional revenue raised to be reinvested in measures to improve child health.
- Bringing in a comprehensive programme to reduce sugar in food and drinks for infants and young children with ambitious targets set for the food industry.

3. Mandatory clear labelling on food and drinks:

The Government should support people to make healthier food choices. 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.

The Government has set a rightfully ambitious target of halving childhood obesity and closing the inequality gap by 2030. In order to achieve that target, and to ensure that the next generation have the opportunity to grow up healthy, we need sustained action to create environments that promote healthy options, whilst addressing the conditions that lead to poor health. The prevention Green Paper is an opportunity for Government to tackle a huge challenge with bold policies that have the potential to protect people from future ill-health.

For more information on the OHA's recommendations please contact Caroline Cerny, Alliance Lead, caroline.cerny@obesityhealthalliance.org.uk / 020 7424 1114

These recommendations reflect priority areas for action agreed by OHA members. Individual members may submit their own recommendations with their organisational priorities. A full list of OHA members is [here](#).