

Obesity Alliance Cymru: A national strategy on preventing and reducing obesity

Obesity Alliance Cymru is a sub-group of the Welsh NHS Confederation Policy Forum.

Obesity is a major public health challenge in Wales. Almost 60% of adults and 26% of children in Wales are overweight or obese. Obesity is the leading cause of major health conditions including Type 2 diabetes, stroke, cardiovascular disease and some cancers. Reducing and preventing obesity would therefore significantly reduce the likelihood of developing these conditions.

Welsh legislation and policy frameworks, including the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017, the prudent healthcare agenda and the forthcoming child health plan, coupled with cross-party support for action on obesity, present a unique opportunity to address this crisis.

We call for a strong and ambitious strategy that can make a real difference to the health and well-being of the nation. Such a strategy should aim to reduce health inequalities in relation to poor diet and obesity levels, ensure that the environment promotes healthy, affordable choices across all sectors, and increase public engagement on the issues around diet to reduce barriers to healthy choices, physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight. We extend our offer of expertise, knowledge and experience to Welsh Government and have made 18 recommendations which should be implemented to deliver meaningful change.



Protecting children

Every child has the right to a healthy start in life. More than a quarter of children are overweight or obese in their first year of primary school. Public Health Wales NHS Trust notes that “reception-age children are significantly more likely than the Welsh average to be obese, if they live in areas of higher deprivation.” Obesity prevalence in this age group is highest in Merthyr Tydfil, and is statistically significantly higher than the Welsh average in Blaenau Gwent, Gwynedd and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Studies tracking childhood obesity into adulthood have found that the probability of overweight and obese children becoming overweight or obese adults increases with age. Since the introduction of the Obesity Pathway 2010 in Wales, the lack of specialist services in Wales has been well documented. In addition, advertising and marketing of high fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) food and drink has been shown to influence purchases, consumption and food preferences, particularly amongst children.

Welsh Government should:

- 1. Review rules covering sponsorship of sports and family attractions in Wales and marketing communications in schools, hospitals, leisure centres and other publicly owned or managed spaces in Wales. In addition, Welsh Government should urge the UK Government to close existing loopholes to restrict children’s exposure to HFSS food marketing across all media, including broadcast and social media.**
- 2. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the Soft Drinks Industry Levy on consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) in Wales and take action to reduce the consumption of SSBs. Any revenue raised through the levy should be redirected to programmes that tackle childhood obesity.**
- 3. Expand the Child Measurement Plan for Wales beyond the current 4-5 year olds, for example to year four, as previously piloted. This will provide evidence against which to evaluate the success of interventions designed to tackle childhood obesity.**

Making healthy choices easier

Our current obesogenic environment makes it difficult for people of all ages to make healthy food choices. Welsh Government has a leading role to play in regulating the retail environment and in understanding the barriers faced by many in making the healthy choice. The retail environment places an emphasis on large portions, price promotions and foods that contain excessive amounts of HFSS. 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 choice.



Welsh Government should:

- 4. Explore options and take action to make healthier choices in the retail and out-of-home environments easier, including exploring a potential curb on promotional positioning (e.g. at checkouts) and pricing (e.g. buy one get one free) of HFSS and increase promotion of healthier affordable choices .**
- 5. Gather evidence on how nutritional labelling is most effective in the out-of-home sector with a view to empowering consumers to make healthier choices.**
- 6. Lobby the UK Government to strengthen traffic light front-of-pack nutrition labelling as part of negotiations to leave the European Union and any future trade deal agreements, seeking clarification on potential devolved powers in this area following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.**

Creating a healthy environment

The wider environment plays an important role in supporting healthy living. Action is needed across society to create environments that encourage healthier behaviours and address the inequalities that drive obesity. The public sector, both at national and local level, must provide leadership in creating non-obesogenic environments and promote healthy eating to staff and visitors in hospitals, leisure centres and government premises. Schools are best placed to ensure children both eat and learn about healthy foods.

Welsh Government should:

- 7. Provide local authorities with the resources needed to take action on obesity. This should include increased and continued investment in public health, active travel and promoting cooking skills in communities.**
- 8. Work with local authorities and communities to respond to obesity challenges through licensing, planning and shaping the local environment.**
- 9. Review guidance for leisure centres and other local authority premises around the sale of SSBs and HFSS foods from shops, cafes and vending machines.**
- 10. Support Public Services Boards to create communities and spaces that will encourage and enhance healthy environments in keeping with the requirements set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This should include a collaborative approach in relation to transport arrangements (as required within the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013), the use of Health Impact Assessments and best practice examples.**



11. Ensure schools implement the Healthy Eating in Schools regulations and have the facilities, resources and funding to help every child learn to cook healthy meals.

12. Ensure that all food served, sold and promoted to staff and visitors on hospital sites promote a healthy balanced diet in line with the Eatwell Guide. This should include shops, cafes and vending machines in hospitals. Welsh Government should ensure that hospitals are appropriately funded to serve healthy, nutritious food to support patients to maintain a healthy diet and weight.

Training and support

Healthcare professionals play a key role in supporting people to lose weight and maintain a healthy weight. It is vital they are equipped with the time, skills and resources to identify and support those who need it. This requirement is underpinned by sustained and significant investment from Welsh Government.

Welsh Government should:

13. Encourage a holistic approach to healthcare by delivering core skills training to all health and social care professionals to support those who are obese or overweight.

14. Support the wider roll out of existing healthy eating initiatives such as those supported by the all-Wales Nutrition Skills for Life™ programme.

15. Work with stakeholders including Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) to develop and promote evidence-based training for all health and social care professionals supporting people to live well for life. This should include a range of training opportunities, such as early identification of overweight and obese individuals, motivational interviewing, Making Every Contact Count, supporting people with mental health conditions to maintain a healthy weight and signposting to other local services.

Leadership and Delivery

Every obese adult and child should have access to an appropriate programme of support. The importance of leadership in the delivery of services cannot be understated to ensure that services are available across Wales. Evidence suggests that availability of services as described in the All Wales Obesity Pathway 2010 remains sporadic, particularly in terms of accessing Level 3 and 4 services. As such, we call on Welsh Government to urgently renew its commitment to the provision of all levels of service across Wales.



Welsh Government should:

16. Commit to increased and continued investment in services to ensure that people are able to access services appropriate to their needs. This should be supported by a requirement that all Health Boards identify strategic leadership and resources to:

- Implement the All Wales Obesity Pathway for adults ensuring services are delivered across all levels of the pathway; and**
- Implement the All Wales Obesity Pathway for children to include access to medical, dietetic and psychological support, in addition to services at lower levels of the pathway.**

17. Urgently review and identify gaps in service and co-ordinate the establishment of all levels of services in all areas of Wales.

18. Publish data on obesity rates to ensure transparency, measure progress and inform future policy.

About Obesity Alliance Cymru

Obesity Alliance Cymru is a sub-group of the Welsh NHS Confederation Policy Forum and is made up of leading health organisations in Wales. Its steering group includes Diabetes UK Cymru (DUKC), the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), the British Dietetic Association (BDA), the Royal College of Physicians (RCP), the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsy), Cancer Research UK (CRUK), the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP), the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (RCSEd) and the Welsh NHS Confederation.

Should you wish to discuss any of the calls made in this document, please contact the Alliance co-Chairs: Sara Moran (sara.moran@diabetes.org.uk) or Gethin Jones (gethin.jones@rcpch.ac.uk).

This document is endorsed by:



Royal College of Occupational Therapists
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