

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street,
London,
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18 May 2020

Dear Prime Minister

Supporting the nation to reach and maintain a healthy weight

I am writing on behalf of the British Dietetic Association, the professional body representing dietitians, the only legally regulated nutrition professionals working in the NHS and wider health and care services. Dietitians support patients with overweight/obesity to help them to build knowledge, confidence and skills to improve their health and wellbeing.

We welcome your recent recognition that government should play a greater role to support the UK population to reach and maintain a healthy weight. Obesity is a complex disease with many contributing factors which include social, environmental, physiological and psychological, and any policy approach must take account of all of them. It is clear that diet, rather than just exercise, must be the primary focus.

I would urge you to approach this in a comprehensive and systemic way. Health inequalities, poverty, our food system and the obesogenic environment are all major factors that must be addressed if we hope to reduce obesity rates and improve people's health outcomes. We must avoid making this a matter simply of individual responsibility. All the evidence shows that this is not something that can be addressed in a sustainable way without ongoing support and a conducive environment, led by government.

Finally, I ask that you and your government avoid stigmatising language in your efforts to better support people living with obesity, and that you call on the media to do the same. Evidence clearly shows that shaming, stigmatising and combative language in relation to obesity has the opposite than intended effect and negatively impacts people's mental health. I would hope terms such as "war on obesity" and "fighting obesity" can be avoided as they are unhelpful and unnecessary.

The British Dietetic Association stands ready to support you and your government in this endeavour. As the experts in this area, we would be very happy to meet with you to set out how the dietetic workforce can play a central role in your efforts in striving for a healthier nation.

Yours sincerely,

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Chair, British Dietetic Association

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