

Next Steps for the Childhood Obesity Plan

A session of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Diabetes took place on 30th January 2018 to discuss the effectiveness of the current Childhood Obesity Strategy. Key Witnesses were:

- **Caroline Cerny** - Lead at **Obesity Health Alliance**, a coalition of over 40 charities, medical royal colleges and campaign groups.
- **Pav Kalsi** - Clinical Advisor at **Diabetes UK**, a British-based patient and healthcare professional and research charity.
- **Dr Ana Pokrajac** - MD MSc FRCP, Diabetes UK National Clinical Champion, Diabetes Consultant and Endocrinologist at **West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust**
- **Professor Jack Winkler** - Emeritus Professor of Nutrition Policy at **London Metropolitan University**

UK's Obesity Endemic- Dr Ana Pokrajac- Diabetes Consultant

'One in five children at reception year is overweight or obese and the proportion is increasing to one in three in year six' - Dr Ana Pokrajac

According to recent reports the UK is the 7th fattest nation in Europe and the 12th fattest nation in the world. To combat this the Government introduced the Childhood Obesity Strategy in August 2016. However many experts have lamented the poor effort this strategy has made there have been calls for this strategy to be improved.

The NHS spends 10% of its budget on obesity, preventable through the right education. Being obese leads to a 5 times higher likelihood in developing Type-2 Diabetes. Diabetes complications themselves also account for 10% of the NHS budget, most of which can be prevented.

Recommendation 1: Take action to ensure healthier food is cheaper and easier to buy.

TV Advertising- Caroline Cerny- Obesity Health Alliance

'Watching adverts for food has a direct impact on what children chose to eat and how much they eat' - Caroline Cerny

Obesity Health Alliance (OHA) has examined the impact of High Fat, Sugar and Salt (HFSS) adverts have on the appetite. Their findings suggested that after viewing these adverts the craving for these foods and the appetite is increased. The Government have made some headway towards targeting obesity by banning advertising for junk food whilst children's TV is showing. Ofcom banned the showing of (HFSS) adverts in 2007.

It has been accepted that many children do not only watch children's channels or TV during certain hours. For example during one 30 minute episode of Channel 4's *Hollyoaks* OHA noted that there were nine adverts for fast food and junk food. This is a show watched by many young people during the week, increasing their exposure to these adverts.

Recommendation 2: A 9pm watershed on unhealthy food adverts and closing loopholes on advertising on non-children specific TV shows.

Joined-Up Thinking- Professor Jack Winkler, London Metropolitan University

'There is a focus, particularly by the food industries, of reformulating food rather than an increase in healthier food' - Professor Jack Winkler

The responsibility for cutting obesity and curbing diabetes cannot be the sole responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Care. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) along with the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) should be creating joint policies to tackle the obesity crisis. Agriculture plays a large part in how a nation eats, what we grow shapes what and how we eat.

There is a current focus on reformulation of food and drink, rather than increasing healthier options. Companies are being encouraged to reduce the sugar and salt in their products substituting these with sweeteners and artificial products. At the same time the UK continues to import fresh food, increasing the price which is then passed on to the consumer affecting the cost of the healthier choice.

Recommendation 3: Ensure DEFRA includes health and obesity in its future policies.

Food Labelling- Pav Kalsi, Diabetes UK

'A poor diet contributes significantly to obesity and the risk of developing Type-2 Diabetes' - Pav Kalsi

When it comes to eating, the healthy choice has to be the easy choice wherever we buy and eat food if we are to truly try and reduce the national obesity crisis. There is no silver bullet to reducing obesity easily but there are easy steps that can be taken by the Government and Local Authorities to improve the health of the nation.

The front of pack traffic light labelling scheme is a quick and clear way of informing consumers about the nutritional content of the food they buy, enabling people to make healthier choices. Making this system mandatory for all pre-packed foods does not require a major overhaul of policy and standards to ensure this is complete.

Additionally, introducing calorie labelling at the point of choice in the out of home sector will help people be more informed when making decisions about what they eat and encourage healthier food choices.

Recommendation 4: Mandatory and consistent nutritional labelling on all foods, such as the traffic light system.

