



The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP

The Prime Minister

10 Downing Street

LONDON SW1A 2AA

21st July 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

NATIONAL HEALTHY WEIGHT CAMPAIGN: ADDRESS THE CAUSE NOT JUST THE SYMPTOMS

As you are aware, a large proportion of children, young people and adults living in the UK are affected by overweight and obesity¹. We have some of the highest levels of overweight and obesity across Europe which is resulting in the NHS footing an annual bill of £6.1bn, with an estimated cost to the wider economy of £27bn². The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how much we need to protect our NHS – the annual cost of obesity is an entirely preventable and avoidable burden to our precious healthcare system. In order to build back better, we need to minimise the unnecessary costs on the NHS so that it can focus its resources on responding to emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.

You will also be aware of how the UK's prevalence of overweight and obesity has meant that many people have sadly experienced severe complications when contracting COVID-19³.

As a network of local authorities working together to promote healthy weight, we strongly welcome the news of a forthcoming announcement on obesity from the Government. Given our network's long history and experience of working to support healthy weight at a local, regional and national level through measures that address the wider determinants of health, we wanted to share our perspectives ahead of this announcement.

We welcome the news of a national campaign that encourages and supports individuals to lose weight. We urge you to ensure that this campaign provides appropriate advice, consistent with Government healthy eating guidelines and it is essential that it is not stigmatising in any way. Weight stigma is very prevalent in the UK, particularly across media, and it can have the opposite desired effect to the one intended. Such campaigns, however, when carefully designed, play an important role in promoting healthy weight.

We strongly believe that what is of greater importance however, is to ensure that we take steps to create an environment that support individuals to make changes in their behaviour, making it easy for people to make the healthy choice. Without this, a national campaign encouraging weight loss would be entirely ineffective and a waste of taxpayers' money. There is simply no point in addressing the symptoms and ignoring the causes.

¹ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-obesity-physical-activity-and-diet/england-2020>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment--2>

³ <https://www.worldobesity.org/news/statement-coronavirus-covid-19-obesity>



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Our weight status is not solely dependent on our personal choices. There are many other significant factors that determine one's weight – including where we live, how much money we earn, who we socialise with, what marketing we are exposed to, our family history and many more factors⁴.

Without any measures to further restrict the marketing of less healthy food and drink, advertisements for this new national health campaign will be dwarfed by the number of advertisements for unhealthy food and drink across a range of platforms. Without any measures to reduce the number of promotions on less healthy food and drink in retailers, these foods will continue to be a more appealing and feasible choice for families compared to healthier products.

Prime Minister, in order to Build Back Better, we urge you to ensure that the forthcoming announcement on obesity includes measures that create an environment that makes the healthy choice, the easy choice.

Yours sincerely, the undersigned:

Matthew Ashton, Lead Director of Public Health for Food Active

Ian Ashworth, Director of Public Health, Cheshire West and Chester Council

Professor Dominic Harrison, Director of Public Health, Blackburn with Darwen Council

Margaret Jones, Interim Director of Public Health, Sefton Council

Eileen O'Meara, Director of Public Health, Halton Council

Dr Sarah McNulty, Director of Public Health, Knowsley Council

Dr Matthew Philpott, Executive Director, Health Equalities Group - Food Active and Healthy Stadia

Dr Arif Rajpura, Director of Public Health, Blackpool Council

David Regan, Director of Public Health, Manchester City Council

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/287937/07-1184x-tackling-obesities-future-choices-report.pdf



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