

# FOOD ACTIVE

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A Collaborative  
Approach to  
Healthy Weight  
and Prevention

**FOOD**  
**ACTIVE**

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**Diet-related ill health in the UK is estimated to lead to approximately 70,000 premature deaths annually, which represents around 12 per cent of the total number of deaths<sup>1</sup>.**

Evidence shows that poor diet has the highest impact on the NHS budget, costing around £6 billion per year. An unhealthy diet is strongly associated and causally linked with a number of chronic, complex conditions such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, some cancers and type II diabetes.

As a nation we continue to experience widespread preventable illness and inequalities in health outcomes. Health data from the Global Burden of Diseases (GBD) Study indicates the top six risk factors for Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALY's) in the UK are tobacco, dietary risks, high body mass index (BMI), high blood glucose levels, high blood pressure and alcohol use<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to the scale of preventable ill-health there is much inequality. Inequalities in health are unjust and avoidable yet they continue to persist. In parts of the UK the conditions for living life in good health are poor and continue to deteriorate. Furthermore, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has

exacerbated inequalities and had a disproportionate effect on disadvantaged communities<sup>3</sup>. It is acknowledged that wider action on prevention will help people to stay in good health and also moderate demand across the health and social care system, a point that is referenced in the recent Government policy paper: 'Working Together to Improve Health and Social Care for All'<sup>4</sup>.

Evidence suggest that wider determinants are the most important drivers of good health, with people's lives strongly influenced by the socio-economic conditions in which they are born, where they live and go to school, and where they eventually die<sup>5</sup>. There is growing recognition of the role of 'place' and communities including access to green space and accessible healthy food options. An effective population-level health system is considered to be one that distributes effort across all pillars: wider determinants of health, health behaviours, an integrated care system, plus places and their communities.

Over the last seven years Health Equalities Group have developed an assemblage of prevention frameworks, with a particular focus on healthy weight, that are intended to engage stakeholders at local level in addressing the structural and environmental factors that can influence the health and well-being of local communities.

## The Local Authority Declaration on Healthy Weight:

The Local Authority Declaration on Healthy Weight: first launched in 2015, this prevention framework presents an opportunity for local authorities to lead local action and demonstrate good practice in adopting a systems approach to healthy weight. A whole-systems approach is key to improving the health of our populations, and local authorities are in a strong position to provide strategic leadership on behalf of their communities.

The Declaration is a statement owned by each adoptive authority, signalling a strategic commitment made across all council departments. Primary aims are to: reduce unhealthy weight in local communities; protect the health and wellbeing of staff and citizens; and, to make an economic impact on

health, social care and the local economy. The Declaration includes 16 standard commitments whereby Local Authorities pledge to achieve action on improving policy and healthy weight outcomes in relation to specific areas of the council's work. Within the Declaration there is also the opportunity for Local Authorities to add local commitments relevant to their community health needs and priorities. These local priorities are primarily determined through a wider consultation process which may include stakeholders such as the Health and Wellbeing Board, CCG (or, increasingly, ICS and Primary Care Networks), third sector, and wider public consultation. A recent review of the Declaration and associated commitments recognises how the Healthy Weight Declaration can support implementation of Public Health England's, Whole Systems Approach to Obesity<sup>6</sup>, to strengthen local plans.



**Above:** Devon County Council adopts the Local Authority Declaration on Healthy Weight (October 2019).

Since 2015, the Declaration has been adopted by 25 councils across England, including districts, unitary, metropolitan authorities and county councils. Many additional councils from the North West, North East, Yorkshire and Humber, South West and the South of England, together with the East Midlands region are currently working towards adoption of the Declaration. Evidence emerging from adoption of the Declaration is starting to demonstrate that a 'local government declaration' on healthy weight is an effective tool in bringing together a range of stakeholders and raising the profile of, as well as setting the agenda on, policies and practices promoting improved diet and physical activity.

*'Weight Neutral or Weight Inclusive'* is an approach being explored and introduced in the delivery of some weight management interventions and services, shifting the focus away from weight loss or weight control



**Above:** Leeds City Council adopt the Local Authority Declaration on Healthy Weight

and emphasising health gains sustained over time. Although limited, there is some evidence to suggest this approach may improve physical, psychological, and behavioural outcomes<sup>7</sup>. The approach, encourages and enables healthy behaviours regardless of weight status<sup>8</sup>. The principles are to maintain a holistic focus on health and challenge the environmental and social structures that can drive inequalities, to promote well-being. Recognising the benefits of this approach, in the delivery of interventions and services, this aligns with the HWD, which aims to address the structural and environmental factors that can promote opportunities for communities to eat well and be active.

COVID-19 has also brought the importance and urgency of addressing overweight and obesity into perspective, with the publication of the National Obesity Strategy in July 2020. It is therefore important for councils to bolster this with local action and build back fairer by supporting the development of healthier places, reducing inequalities and building resilience into recovery plans as part of the wider prevention agenda<sup>3</sup>.

Evidence of impact and case study examples from Local Authorities implementing this approach are demonstrated in [\*Food Active's 'Healthy Weight Declaration: Impact and Influence Case Study Report'\*](#)



**Above:** Partners across Cheshire West and Chester launch the Partner Pledge (Jan'20)

## **The Local Authority Declaration on Healthy Weight Partner Pledge:**

This framework has been developed at the request of local authorities to engage and encourage partners (public, private and third sector) to support the council's declaration and commitment to promoting healthy weight. The Partner Pledge is intended to be specifically used in support of the council's own healthy weight declaration and introduces local authority partners to eight achievable commitments and simple tools to support the adoption process through a system-wide approach to healthy weight.

[Further information is available via the Food Active website](#)

## **The School's Pledge for a Healthy and Active Future:**

The Schools Pledge is a set of commitments that can be adopted

by both primary and secondary schools. The Pledge commits schools to supporting staff, pupils, families and the wider community to eat well and be physically active by developing a school environment which is conducive to encouraging healthy behaviours. The Pledge can be signed by any school within a locality who has adopted the Local Authority Declaration on Healthy Weight, enabling schools to demonstrate their support working in partnership as part of a systems approach. It may also support criteria for local Healthy School Awards, should your school be working towards this. The Schools Pledge has been co-developed with Healthy Schools Leeds and is currently in its 'test and learn' phase. This will involve piloting the pledge in a number of schools in Leeds, with a view to refining the process and supporting materials using the invaluable feedback from those taking part in the pilot. We anticipate the full package of finalised resources will be ready in time for the new academic year from September 2021 onwards.

## **NHS Healthy Weight Declaration:**

Local Authorities work in partnership with a range of NHS organisations in preventing ill-health. As there are clear overlaps in the prevention aspirations and commitments set out in the Local Authority Declaration, there has been growing interest in developing an NHS Healthy Weight Declaration to help facilitate a collaborative system-wide approach to reducing the prevalence of excess weight within local populations.

In supporting NHS organisations to meet the commitments within the NHS Long Term Plan and to build on the existing good practice in promoting healthy weight, NHS England South West and Public Health England South West, working with Food Active and Diabetes UK South West commissioned a programme to develop and pilot a Healthy Weight Declaration for NHS organisations.



The NHS Declaration has been developed to include commitments that can be utilised by a range of organisations involved in delivery of NHS services such as hospital trusts, mental health trusts, ambulance trusts, community and clinical commissioning groups and primary care providers to maximise opportunities to encourage and promote healthy weight for staff, patients, visitors and the wider community. The NHS Declaration takes an organisational approach to reducing the prevalence of unhealthy weight, whilst considering opportunities to address prevention across a range of specialities, facilitating strategic engagement as part of the wider health and well-being agenda.

The NHS Declaration is designed to build on how an organisation is meeting mandatory standards in the NHS Standard Contract, in addition to: the NHS Long-Term Plan and COVID Recovery Response Requirements; Government work to reduce child and adult obesity, including calorie and sugar reduction; promoting healthy food and drink in hospitals, including healthier vending; and, supporting patients, staff and visitors to be more physically active, including through active travel.

A number of resources have been developed to support implementation of the NHS Declaration and a 'Summary & Evaluation Report' detailing the piloting of the NHS Declaration is also available.

More recently, Food Active has been working in collaboration with the Cheshire & Merseyside Health and Care Partnership to develop and pilot a prevention pledge that is helping NHS organisations to achieve Anchor Institution status. This work aligns to a similar structure to that of the NHS HWD, however incorporates a broader set of principles to support NHS organisations consider

prevention activities relating to social value, their 'anchor role' in local communities, and additional commitments within the NHS long term plan.

Whilst there are a number of different approaches described in this document, they are currently being used as complimentary frameworks, and have been designed to support wider systems working as part of a 'place-based' approach to promote healthy weight and support prevention activities. Food Active can offer a range of support and resources in adopting or implementing any of the models set out.

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The Food Active team has a broad range of experts specialising in public health nutrition, local and national policy, research, planning for health and community interventions. **To speak with one of the team or to discuss any of the above in further detail, please contact:**

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