

Adopting and Implementing an NHS Healthy Weight Declaration

About the NHS Healthy Weight Declaration

Obesity now accounts for more deaths in England and Scotland than smoking among people in middle- and old-age. Being overweight or obese is linked to a wide range of diseases, most commonly: type 2 diabetes; hypertension; some cancers; heart disease; stroke; liver disease. Obesity can also be associated with poor psychological and emotional health, and poor sleep. Obese adults may also be more likely to suffer from stigma which may impact on their self-esteem.

There is recognition that obesity is a complex problem; factors that significantly influence obesity include genetics, behaviour, culture and the environment. Yet, despite the widespread recognition of the complexity of obesity, health, social and economic costs and efforts to promote healthier lifestyles, unhealthy weight persists. Evidence also demonstrates that the impact of obesity on COVID-19 outcomes has been stark, people living with obesity are more likely to have significantly poorer outcomes. To avoid the rising burden of weight-related illness, wider action on prevention of ill-health will help people stay healthy and healthier for longer.

The NHS Long Term Plan set out action to tackling obesity, in addition to the Government's national strategy; 'Tackling Obesity: empowering adults and children to live healthier lives. Priorities across the NHS including expanding access to weight management services both digitally and face to face and to empower primary care and clinical staff to provide brief interventions, including through Healthy Weight Coaches and the Moving Medicine programme.

There is a lack of evidence, however, about how NHS organisations can contribute to whole systems approaches to tackling obesity and maximise their opportunities and reach to influence behaviour change. NHS organisations are already working to deliver action through various strategic frameworks that contribute to promoting a healthy weight, including Hospital Food Standards, Staff Health and Wellbeing Strategies, Food and Drink Strategies and Sustainable Development Management Plans. The connection between these strands of work and promoting a healthy weight across an NHS organisation is not always clear nor the mechanisms to engage patients, clinical staff and visitors.

To address this, an NHS Healthy Weight Declaration has been developed by Food Active, working in partnership with NHS England South West, Public Health England South West (now Office for Health Improvement & Disparities) and Diabetes UK South West, supporting NHS organisations to work as part of a wider system to address this major public health issue.

What will we be signing up to?

An NHS Declaration provides a mechanism for organisations to signal their commitment and demonstrate leadership and a coordinated approach to address unhealthy weight. It also enables a number of different NHS organisations to develop a consistent approach, working in partnership across organisational boundaries to address unhealthy weight and support the prevention agenda.

What are the benefits of signing up?

Evidence gathered from stakeholders and the process evaluation, following the piloting of the declaration demonstrate that the NHS HWD:

- Provides a framework to galvanise work and priorities relating to the healthy weight agenda, whilst also providing opportunities to consider prevention more broadly
- The approach establishes a longer-term commitment to reducing the prevalence of excess weight, included and referenced in organisational strategies (helping to provide a structure for governance and reporting on healthy weight action plans)
- Is a useful lever when considering converging agenda's, to bring a range of departments on board and engage wider stakeholders who traditionally may not have played a direct role in promoting healthy weight (for some Trusts this involves working with partners 'at place' who have adopted the Local Authority Healthy Weight Declaration)
- Supports strategies to reduce health disparities and COVID recovery plans, particularly from a staff health and well-being perspective
- Instigates leadership within the organisation, engaging executive and clinical sponsors to drive a cultural shift across the organisation and develop the role of clinical champions
- Is a mechanism in helping to continue and carry forward the historic CQUIN work (food and staff health and well-being) and promote the new hospital food standards
- Develops the role of champions, both NED's and workplace champions, to communicate messages and support the wider workforce

How does an NHS HWD Work in practice?

The declaration consists of a set of commitments whereby NHS organisations pledge support to achieve action on improving policy, prevention and healthy weight outcomes for the benefit of staff, patients and the wider community.

The commitments have been developed based on a review of the evidence taking into account the impact of prevention in improving health, reducing health disparities, increasing healthy life expectancy and the economic savings as a result of reduction in obesity and associated chronic disease. A copy of the evidence base is available.

The commitments have been agreed through reaching consensus with stakeholders. Consultation has been facilitated with stakeholders from across NHS organisations in the South West of England including partners from within academia, local authorities, NHS England and Public Health England.

A number of 'strategic core commitments' have been considered that offer some synergy with those in the Local Government Declaration. The strategic core commitments align to all types of NHS organisations, offering the opportunity for a range of organisations to adopt the NHS Declaration on Healthy Weight.

'Organisational commitments' have been considered that take account of specialisms, specific services or programme delivery that are relevant to different types of NHS organisations, which would not be provided universally. The optional organisational commitments aim to cover the range and the breadth of national and local work programmes available to tackle

unhealthy weight, so that organisations can align the declaration with local priorities.

By signing up to the declaration, the commitments provide a framework to align any existing activity underway within NHS Trusts that promotes healthy weight, whilst identifying gaps and opportunities. It is then possible to develop action plans and engage wider stakeholders to drive further prevention activity that addresses local or organisational priorities to improve healthy weight outcomes.

There is an appreciation that many NHS organisations will already be working to meet agreed actions/priorities set out within existing plans, strategies or policies in relation to healthy weight, food, nutrition and physical activity or other aspects of prevention. It is important that the declaration is not seen as an additional policy or strategy and that the declaration can, however, be used to coordinate all activity linked to these agendas and provide an umbrella and a focus.

By signing up to the declaration, an organisation is able to demonstrate strategic leadership on this agenda and develop methods of engaging wider stakeholders and hold the relevant partners within an organisation to account. The declaration should also act as a lever to engage external partners, third sector organisations and private providers to consider their role in supporting healthy weight plans and strategies.

The information summarised below offers some simple steps and key considerations in adopting an NHS HWD, generated as a result of learning from the Local Government Declaration on Healthy Weight and the piloting of the NHS HWD.

Practical Steps in Adopting an NHS HWD

Step one: Consider leadership, accountability and governance & local systems

It is widely accepted that healthy weight is everyone's responsibility and requires concerted effort working across a range of disciplines and organisational boundaries to bring about significant impact and positive change. A tiered approach to engagement at a range of levels across the NHS system may need to be considered:

- **Engaging Integrated Care Systems (ICS):** through their approach to population health, ICS' may hold NHS organisations to account in terms of their responsibilities to prevention.
- **Taking a 'Commissioner/Provider' Approach:** commissioners signing up to a healthy weight declaration may place an expectation on providers to do the same. Collective action across
- a number of NHS organisations working together with support from an IICS may help to embed this approach to addressing unhealthy weight within local strategies and policy.
- **Health and Well-being Boards:** may also be a useful mechanism when considering accountability and governance, the majority of local NHS organisations within a geographical footprint will be represented on their Health and Well-being board. Embedding the declaration within governance structures at this level may also support a longer-term approach to prevention and subsequent action to prevent unhealthy weight.

Step two: Getting started

Experience suggests that adoption of a healthy weight declaration gains most traction, within an individual organisation, where this is driven at executive officer level, with senior management team support. The key objective is to make a sound case, develop the rationale and identify a champion. Build up a compelling picture why action is needed; this might be in the form of briefings or presentations at multidisciplinary forums or strategy groups. These types of forums allow for a range of senior officers from a range of disciplines to consider how the declaration relates to strategic aims and objectives, supporting documents are available to

assist NHS organisations with this phase. There are a number of strategies or policies that NHS organisations may already be committed to delivering that can act as a lever and help to meet some of the commitments set out within the NHS healthy weight declaration; examples might include the NHS Workforce Health and Wellbeing Framework, Sustainable Development Management Plans, existing Food and Drink Strategies, joint health and well-being strategy. Creating a compelling picture on the impact and mutual benefit that can be achieved through adoption and implementation is key in building support.

Step three: Executive Level Sponsors or Champions

Learnings generated demonstrate the benefit and impact of sponsors at senior officer level, to champion action in support of the commitments and to act as a positive role model. This will help to signal senior level intent to support the approach behind the healthy weight declaration and consider how individual organisations ensure that they are a positive exemplar.

Champions at senior level, endorsing this approach must also communicate to operational staff and middle managers the investment in this approach and the long-term benefits, giving permission for staff to engage.

Step four: Internal stakeholders

For NHS organisations adopting and implementing a Healthy Weight Declaration, internal stakeholder engagement is key in raising awareness across the organisation. These may be departments or teams who may not have previously or traditionally considered healthy weight as an issue that they may have influence over or considered the impact of prevention on particular elements of service delivery.

Stakeholder engagement is key in opening up dialogue to consider new approaches to addressing unhealthy weight providing wider engagement to consider new and innovative approaches. This may then formulate the basis of a working group/steering group or engagement with other operational groups whose work has a direct impact or is aligned with the Healthy Weight Declaration commitments.

Examples of internal stakeholders

Trust Chief Executive/Chairman
Clinical Service Leads e.g. Nutrition and Dietetics
Director/Assistant Director of Nursing
Director of Human Resources
Director of Estates and Facilities
Workplace/Staff Health and Well-being Lead
Head of Occupational Health and Well-being
Communications Manager
Workplace Champions
Health Mentors

Step five: Who else needs to be involved in the process of adopting the declaration?

There are many healthy weight stakeholders across an ICS who will have an interest in the Declaration and what signing up to it might mean for the organisation. It is useful if they have a good understanding of the content and purpose of the Declaration so they can support the process.

Key local stakeholders might include: Director of Public Health, Lead Member for Health, Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, Clinical Leads, Consultants in Public Health/Health Improvement Leads, Primary Care Networks, GPs, Dietitians, and Prevention Leads.

Step six: Additional stakeholders

Additional resources should not be too significant; however, it is helpful from the outset to ensure that individuals within the organisation are delegated as a lead for the declaration to facilitate activity and maintain momentum.

Evidence suggests a lead or champion

from different disciplines can help to drive activity forward e.g., staff side, patient experience or clinical speciality can help to engage different divisions or staff teams. A working group or stakeholder group can assist in implementation, support reporting mechanisms and review of progress.

Step seven: Establishing a framework or action plan

this can be developed alongside adoption of the Declaration, formal ratification of the action plan/delivery plan can help to facilitate a process for reporting and reviewing progress.

Keeping the declaration as a standing item at working group meetings and strategy group meetings can also help to maintain momentum.

Step eight: What in addition, might help?

Consider a buddy system with other NHS colleagues to share learning or consider ways of overcoming barriers, blockages in the system. Communications are also key in successful implementation,

regular communications provide a platform for organisations to demonstrate their ongoing commitment, share consistent messages and recognise achievements.

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Further information regarding the process evaluation and resources to support adoption, implementation and audit of the NHS HWD are available.

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DECLARATION ON
**healthy
weight**

HEALTH
EQUALITIES
GROUP 

**FOOD
ACTIVE**