

Scotland has some of the highest incidences of obesity across OECD countries¹. Currently 65% of adults are overweight or obese, and 26% of children aged 2 to 5 years old are at risk of being overweight including 13% who are at risk of being obese². Overweight and obesity has become a major health issue in Scotland, negatively impacting on quality of life, affecting productivity and often leading to serious chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Scottish Obesity Alliance is a forum for organisations to collaborate to influence policy and practice on obesity prevention in Scotland. It is composed of leading national health charities, medical royal colleges, campaign groups and professional bodies with an interest in health and public health. We work together to influence the Scottish and UK Governments policy on overweight and obesity.

Our vision is for:

A Scotland which promotes health and wellbeing.
*A Scotland where healthy food and physical activity choices are easy, acceptable,
affordable and sustainable for all.*

Here we outline the key areas where action is required. Scottish Obesity Alliance will collectively identify policy solutions to reduce rates of overweight and obesity in Scotland using the available evidence base.

Protect our young

Obesity in childhood is associated with an increased risk of obesity in adulthood, highlighting the need for early intervention and prevention. More needs to be done to protect our young from ill-health now and later in their adult life. This includes improving nutrition in early life, and changing the environment to enable children to make healthy food and physical activity choices.

Make healthy choices easy

The current obesogenic environment makes it difficult for people of all ages to make healthy choices. There are less opportunities to walk and take enough exercise in our daily lives. There is an emphasis on promotions, over-sized portions, and food and drink products that contain excessive amounts of calories, fat, sugar and salt. Urgent action is needed to change promotions (monetary and non-monetary) and to reformulate food and drink products across the retail and out-of-home sector.

¹ OECD (2017). Obesity Update 2017 <http://www.oecd.org/health/health-systems/Obesity-Update-2017.pdf>.

² The Scottish Government. (2018) The Scottish Health Survey, 2017 edition, volume 1 - main report. <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/09/9247/downloads#res542085>

Create healthy environments

Significant action is needed to create environments that enable healthy food and physical activity behaviours for everyone. Planning and licensing legislation can help to shape the local environment to increase opportunities for physical activity and active everyday lives, as well as tackle the availability of unhealthy food and drink. The public sector plays a leading role in promoting healthy environments for all staff and visitors in all its institutions including hospitals, workplaces, leisure centres and schools. Restrictions on all broadcast and non-broadcast advertising are needed to reduce exposure to unhealthy food and drink products to people of all ages, especially children.

Develop a strong workforce

Professionals working in healthcare play a critical role in supporting individuals to lose and maintain a healthy weight. They need to be provided with the time, skills and resources to identify and support those at risk/living with overweight or obesity, associated co-morbidities including type 2 diabetes and cancer, and in contexts where mental health co-morbidities are common. In addition non-medical workforces need to be better utilised to provide specialist and/or intensive support such as health psychologists or mental health professionals. Strategic workforce and training changes are needed to improve the support available.

Tackle inequalities in obesity

Inequalities in obesity exist in Scotland. The likelihood of obesity is higher for people living in deprived areas, particularly women and children³. 32% of adults living in the most deprived areas are obese, compared to just 20% of those living in the least deprived areas⁴. Tackling inequalities is key to tackling obesity, and underpins our other identified areas for action to ensure that all weight-related health inequalities are reduced. Action is needed to address the inequalities that drive obesity.

For further information, see obesityactionsotland.org or contact us:

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³ NHS Health Scotland (2017) ScotPHO: Obesity and health inequalities in Scotland, Summary report.

⁴ Scottish Government (2017) Scottish Health Survey 2016: volume 1: main report.
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/10/2970>