Scottish Obesity Alliance
Manifesto for the 2021 Scottish Parliamentary Election

OUR ASKS

Tackling obesity has never been more important to keep the population healthy. The Scottish Obesity Alliance calls on the Scottish Parliament and Government to take urgent action to reduce obesity and health inequalities in Scotland through the following priority actions:

» A commitment from all political parties to deliver the Restricting Food Promotions Bill
» Incorporation of the 20-minute neighbourhood model as a central principle in town and country planning. Ensuring such neighbourhood models facilitate access to healthy, affordable food and daily physical activity opportunities

We would also seek support for the following:

» A commitment to develop a new strategy to follow from the current Scottish Government Diet and Healthy Weight Plan
» A re-stated commitment to achieving the target of halving childhood obesity by 2030 and tackling the population level drivers associated with overweight and obesity
» A commitment to an additional measure of childhood weight (in addition to P1, e.g. P7 or S1) to monitor appropriate healthy growth, with early opportunities to avoid significant overweight or underweight
» Place the restoration of support services, including the weight management service, at the centre of post pandemic and NHS recovery, learning from how technology can provide more flexible and accessible options for people in need of support
» Ensure equitable access to effective weight management services through implementation of actions from the Diet and Healthy Weight Delivery Plan
» Provide patients who have been hospitalised for Covid or who are suffering from long-Covid, with access to a structured, multidisciplinary rehabilitation package that includes weight management, healthy diet and physical activity
» Improve environments to enable healthier, active commuting within cities, developing high quality cycle networks, reducing car dependency
» A commitment to the cultural change needed to reduce weight stigma and bias by policy makers, journalists, service providers, healthcare professionals and in public health campaigns

Situation in Scotland

Scotland’s obesity rates in the population are amongst the highest across the OECD countries\(^1\), with 66% of adults having a BMI in the overweight or obesity categories, including 29% obesity, and 30% of children aged 2-15 at risk of overweight, including 16% at risk of obesity\(^2\). 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 many cancers\(^3\).

Worryingly, the gap in prevalence among those living in the least and most deprived areas of Scotland
continues to widen. The likelihood of obesity is higher for people living in deprived areas, particularly for women and children. In 2019, prevalence of obesity among adults living in the least deprived areas was 23%, compared to 36% among those living in the most deprived areas. In children, risk of overweight and obesity was 23% in the least deprived areas, compared to 35% in the most deprived areas: a difference of 12%. This suggests that the inequalities gap in prevalence of overweight and obesity in Scotland’s children has grown by 5% between 2018 and 2019.

The Scottish Government’s commitment to halve childhood obesity by 2030 is not on track to be achieved, with an additional 18,000 children at risk of obesity since the commitment was announced.

Addressing the drivers of inequalities is key to tackling obesity, and underpins the Scottish Obesity Alliance’s areas for action. For example a recent study has shown that Scottish children who reside within more deprived areas of Scotland have greater exposure to alcohol, ice cream and frozen dessert product advertising at bus stops, compared to those living in less deprived areas. We know that actions to reduce the obesogenic environment, including structural changes not dependent on individual agency, are urgently needed if the long-term health, social and inequality consequences of obesity are to be reduced.

Impact of Covid

With obesity found to be a risk factor in the severity of, and risk of death from Covid, and links identified between obesity and poorer outcomes in younger people, the need to improve the health of Scotland’s population has never been more urgent. Evidence also reveals an association between obesity, socioeconomic status and Covid, showing a social gradient with poorer outcomes for those from more socio-economically deprived areas, which is likely multifactorial. Groups affected by socio-economic inequalities in Scotland reported being more likely to experience poor mental health during the pandemic.

The Covid pandemic has reiterated the need for strong and urgent action to address the inequalities that drive obesity.

Additionally, the Covid pandemic has had a serious impact on access to services, including weight management and dental. With limited access to health-related services, and many local public health programmes suspended, stringent national measures to protect public health are more important than ever. However, we have seen national public health prevention measures delayed in Scotland, including the Restricting Foods Promotions Bill, and staff who work on NCD prevention across Scotland being redeployed. This is not a sustainable position and only by ensuring a refocus on population prevention measures will we achieve what is needed to build health and resilience in the Scottish population.

Urgent Action to Achieve Healthy Weight

The current obesogenic environment makes it difficult for people of all ages to make healthy choices. There is an emphasis in the current food environment on promotions, over-sized portions, and food and drink products that contain excessive amounts of calories, fat, sugar and salt.

Scotland has been consistently missing population dietary goals for almost 20 years. Food and drink that
is high in fat, sugar and/or salt (HFSS) continues to be heavily promoted and is widely available. Urgent action and priority attention is needed to change promotions (monetary and non-monetary)\textsuperscript{11} and to limit the marketing and advertising of these products.

The response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant changes in our daily lives has led to a changed attitude to food and diet. There have been some positive and some negative implications, including more cooking from scratch and increased consumption of fruit and vegetables,\textsuperscript{12, 13} but also increased snacking\textsuperscript{13} and alcohol consumption\textsuperscript{14}. The adaptation and recovery agenda needs to build on these positive changes but also ensure that we tackle the further challenges in diet that have emerged\textsuperscript{12-14}.

During the lockdown measures last year, a significant shift in public attitude to walking in Scotland occurred. The Scottish Government should take the opportunity to build on this, championing and promoting walking, across Scotland: the most accessible, equitable and effective way to increase population physical activity levels\textsuperscript{15}.

We are calling on all parties and candidates to recognise the significant challenge Scotland’s high obesity prevalence poses to public health and inequalities, ensuring that all actions from Scotland’s Diet and Healthy Weight Delivery Plan are implemented. We urge immediate changes to both the food and physical activity environment, making it easier for everyone to make healthy choices. Such population wide, structural interventions are the most effective actions in tackling obesity and related inequalities\textsuperscript{16}.

**URGENT ACTION REQUIRED**

The Scottish Obesity Alliance calls on the Scottish Parliament and Government to take strong and urgent action to reduce obesity and health inequalities in Scotland through the following priority actions:

- **A commitment from all political parties to deliver the Restricting Food Promotions Bill**
- **Incorporation of the 20-minute neighbourhood model in the planning process. Ensuring such neighbourhood models facilitate access to healthy, affordable food and daily physical activity opportunities**

**Further Actions to Achieve Healthy Weight**

Obesity is a multifactorial, complex issue influenced by a number of interacting factors\textsuperscript{17}. Covid-19 has had a profound impact on many further aspects related to obesity such as data gathering, weight management service delivery and understanding of the links between weight and health. As we emerge from the pandemic and look towards Scotland’s recovery, those recovering from Covid will return to their communities, with many requiring ongoing rehabilitation.

Prevention can also be central in the recovery agenda for individuals. Psychology is crucial to help us to understand behaviour and anticipate people’s responses to changes in government policy and public health guidelines, and to promote and enable the behavioural changes that require to flow from or follow structural interventions\textsuperscript{18}. Importantly, public health guidance must be free from weight stigma and bias, as must the delivery of weight management services. Weight stigma can increase the risk of obesity, cause people to miss doctors’ appointments, and result in poorer quality of care and worse outcomes\textsuperscript{19}. 
Our additional asks of the next Scottish Parliament are therefore:

» A commitment to develop a new strategy to follow from the Scottish Government’s current Diet and Healthy Weight Delivery Plan

**Childhood Obesity**

» A re-stated commitment to achieving the Scottish Government’s target of halving childhood obesity against the 2016 baseline and inequalities issues associated with overweight and obesity

» A commitment to an additional measure of childhood weight (in addition to P1, e.g. P7 or S1) to monitor appropriate healthy growth, with early opportunities to avoid significant overweight or underweight

**Workforce and Weight Management Services**

» Place the restoration of support services, including the weight management service, at the heart of NHS recovery, including the sharing of learning on how technology can provide more flexible and accessible options for people in need of support

» Ensure equitable access to effective weight management services through implementation of actions from the Diet and Healthy Weight Delivery Plan

» Provide patients who have been hospitalised for Covid or who are suffering from long-Covid with access to a structured, multidisciplinary rehabilitation package that includes weight management, healthy diet, and physical activity

» Improve environments to enable healthier, active commuting within cities, developing high quality cycle networks, reducing car dependency

» A commitment to taking concrete steps to encourage the cultural change needed to reduce weight stigma and bias by policy makers, journalists, service providers, healthcare professionals and in public health campaigns

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**The Scottish Obesity Alliance calls on the next Scottish Parliament and Government to take strong and urgent action to reduce obesity and health inequalities in Scotland**

The Scottish Obesity Alliance is a forum for organisations to collaborate to influence policy and practice on obesity prevention in Scotland. It is composed of 27 leading national health charities, medical royal colleges, campaign groups and professional bodies with an interest in health and public health. The Alliance works together to influence the Scottish and UK Governments policies on healthy weight and obesity.

At the point of publishing, the following Scottish Obesity Alliance members have indicated their support of this manifesto:
References

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12. Obesity Health Alliance (2020) Briefing: How are COVID-19 measures affecting the food environment?
14. Alcohol Focus Scotland, Alcohol Change UK (2020) Alcohol Focus Scotland and Alcohol Change UK Polling Statistics Summary

For further information, see www.scottishobesityalliance.org or contact us:

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