

Obesity UK statement in response to the Government's obesity strategy

27th July 2020

Obesity UK welcomes the Government's new focus on obesity, and hope that this will reflect a long term commitment to supporting people living with obesity. To date, there has been little focus from the Government, the focus has primarily tended to be on prevention rather than support or treatment.

We are supportive of the new laws that will ban the advertisement of food high in fat, sugar or salt (HFSS) on television and online before 9pm, and the 'buy one, get one free' offers on these foods. These two initiatives are a good start in supporting healthy behaviours for all of the population including people living with overweight and obesity. However, the new strategy does not go far enough in terms of supporting people living with obesity, and does not reflect the complex, chronic, multifaceted nature of obesity that was highlighted in the UK Government Foresight Report published in 2007. This report highlighted that there are over 100 different factors that can contribute to overweight and obesity, and whilst the environment plays an important role, so does genetic, biological, social and psychological factors. Many of these factors have not been addressed in this strategy.

We are keen to see what expanding NHS services will look like and we hope that this will include an increase in access to all tiers and for people across the UK. Before, COVID-19 only ~45% of the country had access to weight management services, and we would like to see nationwide access to these services, with an expansion into more mental health support for people living with obesity and bariatric surgery procedures.

We are surprised to see no commitment of funding or investment in supporting those with obesity, the government's localism agenda has placed Local Authority's and Clinical Commissioning Groups at the forefront of the obesity crisis. However with the cuts of the last decade, they are unable to do more and people living with obesity are likely to be in the middle of the of the national vs local confusion of priority and agenda setting, with the result being the same, people living with obesity are yet again forgotten.

Obesity UK is committed to changing the narrative around obesity, from the simplistic rhetoric of 'eat less, move more', so that society can understand the true complexities of obesity. Unfortunately, a large part of the Government's strategy plays into this narrative and as a consequence may lead to further stigma and discrimination that people living with obesity experience on a daily basis.

We are calling for the media to improve the portrayal of obesity. Stigmatising headlines, imagery, fat jokes and in many instances, promotion of weight stigma are seen all too often, and this has been evident throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. When will the Government step in and stop these harmful stigmatising and discriminatory experiences from happening?

People living with severe and complex obesity are not recognised in this new strategy, as the focus appears to be at population level, yet these are the group of people that would benefit the most from a more focused approach.

Obesity UK ask the Government to reconsider the strategy and ensure that they include measures for people living with obesity, especially those with a BMI above 40 and above. We would like to see:



- 1) Increased access to effective treatment options, including bariatric surgery, for people living with obesity, especially those with severe and complex obesity
- 2) Legislation to prevent weight stigma and discrimination
- 3) A public awareness campaign around the complexities of obesity

About Obesity UK

Obesity UK is the leading charity dedicated to supporting people living with obesity. We represent the voice of people living with obesity, through our online support groups we provide peer to peer support to people with their daily struggles with the condition and we actively engage with policy and healthcare professional with the aim to improve access to treatment options.