apse membership resources

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Childhood Obesity Strategy – "A Plan for Action"

The Government has finally released its long awaited Childhood Obesity Strategy. The short document outlines the growing problem and the cost to the NHS at current levels of obesity. Several actions are proposed covering food manufacturers, schools and health professionals

Key proposals:

- A soft drinks levy and a call to industry to reduce sugar levels by 20% in food
- Support to ensure children spend at least 1 hour a day undertaking physical exercise
- Creation of healthy rating scheme for schools, backed by Ofsted inspections

Introduction

The long awaited Childhood Obesity strategy has finally appeared in print at a very short 13 pages in length.

The strategy repeats many of the headline facts on obesity, and embraces several earlier policy announcements, but is keen to stress that the document is the start of a conversation, rather than the final article. The aim is to significantly reduce England's obesity within 10 years.

The Government acknowledge that a third of children aged 2 to 15 are overweight or obese. Obese adults are more than 7 time more likely to develop type 2 diabetes than adults of a healthy weight. Obesity is most prevalent in poorer families. The cost to the NHS in England was £5.1 billion for related ill-health in 2014/15

The drivers are however complex, including behaviour, environment, genetics and culture, but fundamentally the cause is an energy imbalance (more food in than used in activity). It acknowledges that physical activity has benefits for children including organised sports and school clubs

Proposed Actions:

- A soft drinks levy

  This is designed to encourage producers to reduce sugar in their products and will appear in the 2017 Finance bill. The levy can apparently be avoided if they comply within the next 2 years. The proceeds, assuming there are some, will be used to invest in physical activity and diets for school age children. The sports premium will be doubled and £10 million put into healthy breakfast clubs

- Taking out 20% of sugar in products

Industry is challenged to reduce overall sugar content of a range of products by at least 20% by 2020. Nine categories are identified including breakfast cereals, yoghurts, biscuits, cakes, confectionary, pastries, puddings, ice cream and sweet spreads

The reductions will be assessed by Public Health England and targets set for reductions in calorie intake. Unspecified other actions may be taken if there has been insufficient progress by 2020.

- Supporting innovation in making products healthier

  £10 million available for R&D to produce healthier food choices

- Updating the Nutrient profile model

  Current restrictions on advertising relate to a nutrient profile which is 10 years old and will be updated

- Making healthy options available in the public sector

  Public sector buildings including hospitals and leisure centres should provide healthy choices in food. Local authorities should be encouraged to adopt Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services (GBSF)

- Continued support with the cost of healthy food for those who need it

  Re-commitment to the Healthy Start scheme providing £60 million vouchers to low income families

- Helping children to enjoy an hour of physical activity everyday

  Every primary school child should get 60 minutes of exercise a day; 30 minutes through active break time and 30 minutes extra-curricular activity or out of school

  Physical activity to be made a key part of the new healthy schools rating scheme. PHE to issue guidelines for the 2017/18 academic year. An online tool to be developed to assist schools in planning activities

- Improving coordination of schools sport and physical activity programmes

- Creating a healthy rating scheme for primary schools

  From 2017 a voluntary healthy rating scheme to encourage children to eat better and move more. The scheme will be taken into account by Ofsted who are undertaking a review of obesity, healthy eating and physical activity in schools in 2017.

- Making school food healthier

  Acknowledgement of the School Food Plan and a rewrite of the School Food Standards to reflect new advice on sugar. Academies will be encouraged to adopt the new standard and breakfast clubs will be supported

- Clearer food labelling

  Present clearer labelling of food products and especially sugar content

- Supporting early years settings

  Children's Food Trust commissioned to develop revised menus for early year settings with an awareness campaign in 2017

- Harnessing the best new technology

  Development of Apps to inform eating habits

- Enabling Health Professionals to support families

  Suite of health resources to support 'Make Every Contact Count'

APSE Comment

APSE is disappointed by this Obesity Strategy which is predominantly a restatement of existing government policy, makes few commitments and outside of the soft drinks levy, very little financial commitment. There remains uncertainty as to whether the levy will ever be enacted.

Whilst we welcome efforts to encourage physical activity, ensuring changes to eating habits is the only real way to reduce calorie intake and weight. The role of local authorities in providing the infrastructure for delivering activity is we feel undervalued, with too much emphasis on the 190 days a year children spend at school and little on the 175 they do not.

The revision of the School Food Standards and the greater emphasis on healthy living by Ofsted is welcomed and an opportunity for local authority catering providers to demonstrate the added value they bring to both school meals and the wider appreciation of nutrition and food.

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