



Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

Supporting professionals to have healthier weight conversations

Consensus statement



About Public Health England

Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. We do this through world-leading science, research, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. We are an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care, and a distinct delivery organisation with operational autonomy. We provide government, local government, the NHS, Parliament, industry and the public with evidence-based professional, scientific and delivery expertise and support.

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Introduction and purpose

Childhood obesity is a widespread problem in England. In recognition of the need to manage and work towards preventing the increasing prevalence of childhood obesity, a shared commitment has been agreed with collaborating partners to use our collective influence and resources to support the public health workforce to have healthier weight conversations.

This consensus statement describes the intent to work together to maximise support for population behaviour change and includes a core set of principles which outline how professional organisations can support the public health workforce to help individuals and communities significantly reduce their risk of obesity in order to support the national ambition to halve childhood obesity rates by 2030 [1].

This joint approach will support the commitment in the NHS Long Term Plan [2] to ensure nutrition has a greater place in education and training for continuing professional development (CPD) and will assist the public health workforce to utilise their skills to contribute to the NHS Five Year Forward View [3] commitment to ensure every child and young person has optimal health.

Headline message

Professional organisations for the public health workforce commit to work with collaborating partners to promote the practice of healthier weight conversations through the collective and targeted use of resources, skills and knowledge to:

- raise confidence in having healthier weight conversations by upskilling and continuously supporting professionals through education and training
- increase awareness through promotion of relevant evidence-based resources

Background

Childhood obesity can have serious implications for the physical and mental health of a child, which can then follow on into adulthood. Almost 1 in 4 children are overweight or obese when they begin school and 1 in 3 children are overweight or obese by the time they leave primary school [4].

Obesity is associated with health inequalities. There is a clear relationship in child obesity prevalence and social deprivation and a growing gap between the most and least deprived deciles of the population [5].

Research shows an intergenerational effect with higher risks for children whose parents are above a healthy weight. Babies born to women with obesity have a higher risk of fetal death, stillbirth, congenital abnormality, shoulder dystocia, macrosomia and subsequent obesity. Obesity in adults increases the risk of developing serious health conditions including type 2 diabetes, certain cancers and ultimately increases the likelihood of premature death [6]. The growth in childhood obesity suggests that today's children will have a shorter life expectancy than their parents [7].

Evidence suggests that on average, all children are exceeding calorie intake recommendations and children are not active enough with only 18% of children and young people meeting the current Chief Medical Officer guidelines of taking part in physical activity for at least 60 minutes every day [8; 9].

Evidence also suggests childhood obesity is associated with poor mental health, social exclusion and bullying [10; 11].

A lack of knowledge of the latest evidence, training, confidence and support are some of the challenges preventing professionals utilising opportunistic moments to enable behaviour change in relation to eating, activity and weight in childhood.

Action across a child's life course is essential to have an impact on childhood obesity and enable positive behaviour change in relation to eating and activity. The focus should be on:

- preconception and pregnancy
- infancy and early childhood
- older childhood and adolescence
- transition into independent adulthood

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The **Childhood Obesity Plan** prioritises enabling the public health workforce to support families on healthier weight. It calls for action in supporting health professionals to feel confident discussing nutrition and weight issues with children, their families and adults [12].

Core principles

To highlight our commitment to this issue, we, the signatories, commit to the principles outlined below and agree to review our activity in these areas annually to ensure we are supporting these principles.

Model collaborative working

We will take opportunities to engage in and promote a **whole-systems approach** by working collaboratively across organisational boundaries and disciplines to improve awareness of healthier weight, healthier diet and physical activity outcomes of the population.

Support professionals

We commit to supporting professionals within our scope of influence by continual promotion of training and resources to support engagement in CPD in order to enhance the skills of all professional organisation members to encourage and enable them to:

- deliver consistent evidence-based messages around healthier weight, highlighting the importance of a healthy diet and physical activity, raising the issue of excess weight and signposting to available support when necessary and appropriate
- use patient/client-centred communication when working across a child's life course, with a focus on
 - communicating effectively to develop a positive rapport with children, young people, parents and carers, taking in to account their communication strengths and needs
 - developing and delivering the relevant behaviour-change techniques
 - helping to prevent and manage relapse
- where appropriate, routinely assess growth and Body Mass Index (BMI), with a focus on
 - using and interpreting growth charts
 - evaluating BMI
- understand the causes and impact of excess weight and the approaches to mitigate it, with a focus on
 - the risk factors for excess weight, considering children and young people who are at greater risk of obesity
 - the social, cultural, environmental and other factors that have contributed to the obesity epidemic
 - physical and psychosocial comorbidities of excess weight and their potential impact on the health of the patient or client

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- healthy eating and physical activity
- collaboration with community organisations to deliver whole-systems approaches to tackle excess weight and reduce drivers of excess calorie intake and sedentary lifestyles
- national resources including [Childhood Obesity: applying All Our Health](#); [Promoting a healthier weight for children, young people and families: consistent messaging](#) and [Let's Talk About Weight: a step-by-step guide to conversations about weight management with children and families for health and care professionals](#)

We commit to supporting professionals within our scope of influence by promoting resources such as the [Everyday interactions childhood obesity impact pathway](#) to encourage evaluation of programmes of work relating to a healthier diet, physical activity and healthier weight, in order to support capacity and capability building around outcomes and evaluation.

We commit to supporting professionals within our scope of influence by promotion of national parent, child and family-facing resources to members to support families to take action in relation to healthier weight and diet. Resources include:

- [Start4Life](#)
- [Change4Life](#)
- [Rise Above](#)

Act as exemplars

We commit to act as exemplars in promoting healthy behaviours to support healthier weight through:

- our policies and procedures, procurement practices, catering provision and messaging supporting healthier diet, physical activity and healthier weight
- promoting positive workplace wellbeing practices for our staff

List of partners

This consensus statement was co-produced by a number of professional organisations for the public health workforce and is supported by:

- British and Irish Orthoptic Society
- British Association of Prosthetists and Orthotists
- British Dietetic Association
- College of Podiatry
- Institute of Health Visiting
- Institute of Osteopathy
- Royal College of General Practitioners
- Royal College of Midwives
- Royal College of Nursing
- Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
- Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
- Royal Society for Public Health
- School and Public Health Nurses Association
- Society and College of Radiographers

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