



Health and Social Care Committee's request for evidence

Prevention of ill health - obesity

April 2025

This document is a response to the Health and Social Care Committee's request for information to inform the inquiry into the prevention of ill health - obesity.

Contents

1. Policy and regulatory framework.....	3
Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales	3
Social Determinants	3
Commercial Determinants.....	3
Delivery	4
2. Addressing the impact of social and commercial determinants on obesity	6
Healthier Food Environments	6
The Food (Promotion and Presentation) (Wales) Regulations 2025.....	6
Health inequalities.....	7
3. Interventions in pregnancy and early childhood to promote good nutrition and prevent obesity.....	9
Children and Family Pilots	9
Healthy Child Wales, Flying Start, Families First.....	9
Healthy Start.....	10
Playworks holiday project.....	10
Guidance in Regulated Childcare Settings	11
All-Wales Breastfeeding action plan.....	11
4. People’s ability to access appropriate support and treatment services for obesity	12
Weight Management Services.....	12
Psychological factors underpinning overweight and obesity	12
Reducing Stigma and discrimination	13
5. International examples of success	14
Whole Systems Approach	14

1. Policy and regulatory framework

The policy and regulatory framework in relation to preventing and reducing obesity in Wales is set out in our 10-year strategy 'Health Weight: Health Wales'.

Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales

The key components are:

- Healthy Environments: Creating environments that support healthy choices, such as improving access to healthy foods and promoting physical activity
- Healthy Settings: Implementing health-promoting initiatives in schools, workplaces, and communities to encourage healthier lifestyles
- Healthy People: Providing support for individuals to achieve and maintain a healthy weight through various programmes and services
- Leadership and Enabling Change: Ensuring strong leadership and collaboration across sectors to drive the strategy forward.

The strategy responds to the social and commercial determinants of obesity and overweight through several key initiatives:

Social Determinants

Initiatives to

- Enhance the availability and affordability of nutritious foods in communities, especially in areas with limited access
- Support local food initiatives to increase fresh produce availability
- Create safe and accessible spaces for physical activity, such as parks, green spaces and active recreational facilities.
- Encourage active transport through infrastructure improvements
- Implement educational programs in schools and communities to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles.
- Raise awareness about the benefits of maintaining a healthy weight

Commercial Determinants

Supporting Healthier Food Environments, including through:

- Restricting the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages, particularly to children
- Promoting responsible advertising practices that encourage healthier choices

- Working with the food industry to reformulate products to reduce sugar, salt, and fat content
- Encouraging retailers to promote healthier options through pricing and placement strategies
- Promoting the availability of healthy food options in public sector settings.

Delivery

The strategy is delivered through five two-year plans and is supported by the following programmes funded from the Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales budget:

HWHW Funded Programmes 2025/2026	Amount
PIPYN Children and Family Pilots provide support for families with young children to make healthy lifestyle choices. The programme is also part of a wider systems approach, to provide healthier settings and environments for children and families.	£0.6m
Physical Activity element, PIPYN Children and Families Pilots	£0.1m
Whole Systems Approach Work – funding for regional healthy weight teams within health boards to empower and enable local leadership to identify systemic causes of obesity and take effective action to enable sustainable change.	£1.2m
Behaviour Change – funding for Public Health Wales to further develop and promote Healthy Weight Healthy You - a website which provides free universal healthy weight information, advice and resources	£0.2m
All Wales Diabetes Prevention Pilot Programme - a pilot programme aimed to prevent type 2 diabetes in Wales, which is managed nationally by Public Health Wales and delivered regionally by health boards.	£0.8m
The 60+ Active Leisure Scheme aims to increase physical activity in the 60 + age group, the programme is managed by Sport Wales and delivered regionally through local authorities.	£0.5m
FIT FANS offers free 12-week fitness sessions aimed at men and women aged 35 to 65 who are living with obesity, the sessions are delivered by coaching staff at specific regional football clubs. The scheme is managed by the Football Association Wales working in collaboration with the English Football League Trust.	£0.218m

Total	£3.618m
Remaining commitments - to be informed through the 2025-27 Delivery Plan	£0.424m
Total Budget	£4.042m

2. Addressing the impact of social and commercial determinants on obesity

The strategy takes a whole system approach in considering how socioeconomic and environmental factors impact on the opportunities available for people to eat healthier food and be active.

Healthier Food Environments

In 2022, Welsh Government consulted on a package of healthy food environment measures, designed to support consumers to make healthier choices in both the retail and out of home sector, focused on three main themes:

Healthier Shopping Baskets:

- Encouraging retailers to promote healthier food options.
- Implementing measures to make nutritious foods more accessible and affordable

Healthier Eating Out of the Home:

- Improving the availability of nutritional information in restaurants and food outlets.
- Encouraging food establishments to offer healthier menu options

Healthier Local Food Environments:

- Promoting positive choices at hot food takeaways.
- Supporting local initiatives to create environments that encourage healthy eating

In tandem, Welsh Government also consulted on a proposal to restrict the sale of energy drinks to children under 16. This consultation was followed by a call for evidence in relation to energy drink consumption by children in 2024. The call for evidence aimed to gather additional information on the health and societal impacts of energy drink consumption in children to support Welsh Government's decision on how to proceed with this area of policy.

The Food (Promotion and Presentation) (Wales) Regulations 2025

The Food (Promotion and Presentation) (Wales) Regulations 2025 were laid on 11 February 2025 and mark the first phase of regulatory action to be taken forward following Welsh Government's 2022 Healthy Food Environment consultation. The regulations are due to come into force in 2026 and will restrict the promotion of high fat, salt and sugar foods and their display at key selling locations within the retail sector and free refills on sugary drinks in both the retail and out of home sector.

Health inequalities

The **Universal Primary Free School Meals** initiative aims to tackle child poverty and ensure no child goes hungry at school. The scheme ensures that all primary school children can access a free healthy and nutritious lunch.

Our **Food in Schools offer** is underpinned by the **Healthy Eating in Schools (Nutritional Standards and Requirements (Wales) Regulations) 2013**. These set out the types of food and drink that may be provided during the school day and define the nutrient content of school lunches. All food provided in maintained schools (nursery, primary and secondary settings) including all Free School Meals, should adhere to these regulations. A review of the Regulations is currently underway. This is in line with the commitment made in **Healthy Weight: Healthy Weight Strategy** to tackle obesity.

The **school milk scheme** ensures that in Wales, those schools who opt-in are provided with free milk for foundation phase pupils and subsidised milk for those in KS2 (years 3-6).

The school-based '**Food and Fun**' **School Holiday Enrichment Programme** provides food and nutrition education, physical activity and enrichment sessions in areas of socio-economic disadvantage for a minimum of 12 days during the school summer holidays.

The **Pupil Development Grant (PDG)** aims to raise the attainment of children and young people from low-income households. The grant is delivered directly to schools and educational settings to adopt whole school approaches that benefit all learners, with a particular focus on supporting the needs of disadvantaged learners. For example, schools can allocate PDG funds to purchase cooking ingredients and equipment needed for lessons that teach students essential life skills like preparing healthy meals.

The **School Essentials Grant** provides financial support to low-income families to help cover various school-related costs. In addition to financial help towards school uniform and classroom essentials it can also help fund sports kits and equipment for after-school activities and can be used to support practical learning experiences such as cooking and nutrition education.

The **Community Food Strategy** aims to encourage the production and supply of affordable locally sourced food in Wales. It focuses on invigorating and supporting grassroots food-related initiatives and improving the focus on food matters in policy making, planning, and service delivery at a community scale.

Towards this goal, the Welsh Government has committed funding of over £2m, in 2025-26, to further develop the network of **Local Food Partnerships** across Wales. The purpose of this investment is to support the development and long-term viability of local and affordable food initiatives by building strong relationships between them and the communities they serve. Grant funding objectives for Local Food Partnerships include a focus on the local availability, access and consumption of healthy, affordable and nutritious food for all community citizens, including for those with protected characteristics.

The **Active Travel Delivery Plan 2024-2027** sets out in more detail how the Welsh Government and its delivery partners will implement the active travel commitments in **Llwybr Newydd – The Wales Transport Strategy** and the **National Transport Delivery Plan**

and increase modal shift by making active travel easier to access, more attractive to use and more inclusive.

An **Active Travel to School Hub** has been established within the Welsh Government which will consolidate efforts and improve coordination by supporting current initiatives such as the Safe Routes in Communities (SRiC) Grant and directly funded programmes like Active Journeys and WOW Walk to School. The hub will also support collaboration through initiatives like comprehensive mapping of active travel data, developing School Streets guidance, and collaborating with Public Health Wales and Welsh Government colleagues in education. The ultimate goal is to develop a single point for the co-ordination and delivery of active travel to schools across Wales.

3. Interventions in pregnancy and early childhood to promote good nutrition and prevent obesity

Eating well and being active early on helps children feel good, play, learn, and grow strong. The following Interventions are in place to ensure that every child has the best start in life.

Children and Family Pilots

The **PIPYN pilot programme**, funded through Healthy Weight Healthy Wales, focuses on reducing inequalities by addressing different challenges in the following three areas which have high levels of childhood obesity: Anglesey, Cardiff, and Merthyr.

The programme is a nested intervention based on 'Every Child Wales, 10 steps to a healthy weight' and is part of a wider systems approach to provide healthier settings and environments for young children and their families. The programme aims to foster collaboration among local bodies to remove barriers and increase opportunities for families to eat healthily and be active.

The pilots trial new approaches to engaging and supporting families to achieve a healthy weight without stigma for the child or family. The programme provides one-to-one or group support to families as well as free and fun local events and initiatives focused on nutrition, cooking skills, and the importance of physical activity. The programme aims to equip families with access to the resources and knowledge they need to make healthier lifestyle choices.

The family pilots have already engaged with hundreds of families, supporting them to adopt healthier lifestyles. The Children and Family Pilots (PIPYN) are currently being evaluated.

Healthy Child Wales, Flying Start, Families First

Health Visitors provide the **Healthy Child Wales** programme which supports the health and welfare of early years children. The programme delivers key public health messages from conception to 7 years, so that families are supported to make long term health enhancing choices. The programme mandates nine specific contacts with health professionals.

In April 2024, Welsh Government published a new unified operating model to underpin the existing school nursing frameworks in Wales. The operating model will effectively

extend the Healthy Child Wales Programme to all compulsory school-aged children. The NHS in Wales has two years to fully implement the model across Wales.

Flying Start aims to give children under four years in the most deprived areas the best start in life by supporting their Early Childhood Play, Learning, and Care. Eligible families should receive an enhanced level of health visiting support as well as parental support beyond the universal Healthy Child Wales offer, with those with the greatest need receiving more support. Flying Start support includes the promotion of key public health messages and healthy lifestyles, and also involves multi-agency work, such as collaborating with Families First and other initiatives to promote nutrition and physical activity guidance.

The **Families First programme** is designed to improve outcomes for the whole family, with a focus on protecting the rights and wellbeing of babies, children and young people. Based on a population needs analysis, it can include a broad range of interventions, including initiatives focused on nutrition, cooking skills, and the importance of physical activity, ensuring families have access to the resources and knowledge they need to make healthier lifestyle choices. The programme also plays a critical role in embedding health and well-being practices within schools, childcare settings, and community spaces.

Healthy Start

The **Healthy Start Scheme** is a UK Government initiative designed to reduce economic and health inequalities by supporting families on the lowest incomes by providing help to buy fruit, vegetables, milk, and infant formula, as well as free Healthy Start Vitamins.

To increase the promotion of the scheme the Welsh Government commissioned the development of mandatory Healthy Start training for all health professionals working with pregnant women and families with children under 4. This includes modules on nutrition for mothers, infants and young children.

Also to increase promotion, the Welsh Government have made existing promotional materials bilingual and distributed throughout Wales.

Playworks holiday project

The **Playworks Holiday Project** supports children's access to play opportunities and aims to tackle holiday hunger by providing free food and snacks at play schemes during the holiday periods.

We will be investing £5m in 2025-2026 to support children's play opportunities in improving the quality of play spaces and playgrounds. The capital funding will give local authorities the flexibility to purchase large scale items to improve the quality of play spaces, refurbish playgrounds and support in creating inclusive and accessible play spaces.

In taking forward Ministerial Review of Play Actions we will continue to work with local authorities and key stakeholders to support our ambitions in improving opportunities to play, and promote the benefits of play for children's wellbeing.

Guidance in Regulated Childcare Settings

Childcare providers are required to meet National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for children up to the age of 12 years. The standards include a requirement for settings to provide regular drinks and food which should be safely prepared, nutritionally balanced, of good quality and in adequate quantities for their needs. The Welsh Government's **Best Practice Guidance Food and Nutrition for Childcare Settings** supports childcare providers to meet these standards.

The National Minimum Standards also require settings to ensure that children have a range of learning and play experiences, including opportunities to be active, indoors and out. Guidance on early childhood play, learning and care is available via Hwb and stresses the importance of physical activity in the early years for cognition, learning and wellbeing as well as physical development.

All-Wales Breastfeeding action plan

The Welsh Government launched the **All-Wales Breastfeeding 5-year action plan** in July 2019 (AWBAP). The plan identifies strategic goals and aims to guide action for the immediate support for women and families for breastfeeding, together with wider actions to support continued feeding for those mothers who are working and for the wider population health so that breastfeeding is a culturally accepted, supported option. There are Infant Feeding Leads in all health boards across Wales who coordinate the support provided to breastfeeding mothers, as well as support delivery of the breastfeeding action plan.

The plan is currently being reviewed to inform the development of an Infant Feeding Action Plan.

4. People's ability to access appropriate support and treatment services for obesity

The All-Wales Weight Management Pathway is a structured framework designed to support effective weight management services across Wales.

Weight Management Services

This pathway seeks to improve outcomes for individuals by ensuring that all levels of service are built on a shared understanding of the complexity of factors which lead to overweight and obesity. The importance of psychological factors including trauma in addressing overweight and obesity means that a psychologically informed approach should be central to all weight management services to help support positive lifestyle change

The pathway focuses on the weight management journey, from early intervention to specialist support and is divided into four levels:

Level 1: Advice and Self-Directed Support - This includes initial advice and resources for individuals to manage their weight independently through the Healthy Weight Health You [website](#).

Level 2: Multi-Component Weight Management Services – this includes more structured programmes that are organised and commissioned by local health boards, and often delivered through commercial providers, which include dietary, physical activity, and behavioural components. To support the level 2 offer, Welsh Government funds **FIT FANS** which is a free 12-week healthy living and weight loss programme for men and women aged 35 to 65 who want to lose weight and get fitter. FIT FANS is a collaboration between the Football Association of Wales and the English Football League Trust (EFL Trust) with sessions delivered by coaching staff at local professional football clubs across Wales.

Level 3: Specialist Multi-Disciplinary Assessment and Weight Management Service - This level involves more intensive support from a team of specialists. This support could include weight loss drugs. People who meet the clinical guidelines for prescription are also given support with diet and physical activity.

Level 4: Specialist Surgical Services - This includes surgical interventions for weight management when other methods have not been successful

The provision of weight management services in Wales are developed, funded and provided by local health boards in response to the needs of the local population.

Psychological factors underpinning overweight and obesity

There is a very strong link between mental health and trauma and obesity. For this reason, the All-Wales Weight Management Pathway emphasises the need for primary and community care practitioners to be alert to the potential for psychological factors underpinning overweight and obesity. This may be in the form of an eating disorder such as binge eating, disordered eating more generally or previous psychological trauma including adverse childhood experiences. These individuals should be referred to level 3 services to enable a full multi-disciplinary assessment, including from a psychologist. The psychologist will assess their history and current experience of mental health issues, disordered eating and eating disorders, trauma and weight stigma.

Services such as Healthy Weight Healthy You include questions designed to identify people with underlying psychological causes for their overweight or obesity and signposts specialist support.

Reducing Stigma and discrimination

The All-Wales weight management pathway includes fundamentals for service design and delivery. These include that services must be person-centred, empathetic, respectful and non-judgemental. There should be a strong focus on building self-esteem, self-efficacy and resilience to enable people to manage their weight in the long-term. Training on motivational interviewing and empathetic listening is available to support staff to understand weight stigma and communicate sensitively and effectively with those living with overweight and obesity.

5. International examples of success

Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales takes forward a whole system approach drawing on international case studies.

Whole Systems Approach

We provide funding for regional healthy weight teams within health boards to empower and enable local leadership to identify systemic causes of obesity and take effective action to enable sustainable change.

The complexity of the problem means that there are no simple solutions and no one agency or organisation can solve it alone. We all have a role to play. Taking a whole system approach presents an opportunity to do this and is at the front and centre of our delivery plan. It is 'a dynamic way of working, that brings together stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of the challenge, and integrate action to bring about sustainable, long-term change'. It also is about understanding the levers for change, recognising their interdependencies. Several international case studies have also shown, with concerted and sustained effort, promising results in reducing childhood obesity through taking a whole system approach.

We have been working both nationally and locally to embed a whole system approach to healthy weight. Regional whole system teams within Health Boards have engaged extensively with local and national agencies and groups across Wales. Public Health Wales are supporting the regional whole system teams, ensuring consistency of approach and monitoring and evaluating progress. The focus so far has been making the case for collective action and building the importance of healthy weight into the strategic plans of public sector bodies. Each area has also been working with stakeholders and partners to identify priority areas for change, using the latest system tools. These are:

- Access to healthier food for our children and young people.
- Healthier food outlets in the out of home sector.
- Increasing opportunities for spaces for children to run and play
- Healthier advertising in our high streets
- Safer community spaces creating spaces for active travel