

Healthy **Weight**:
Healthy Wales

Pwysau Iach:
Cymru **Iach**



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

HEALTHY WEIGHT: HEALTHY WALES

FINAL ENGAGEMENT REPORT

BACKGROUND

On 17 January 2019, the Minister for Health and Social Services launched a 12-week consultation on the draft of the Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales strategy, which outlines the Welsh Government's ambitions to prevent and reduce obesity in Wales.

The consultation sets out proposals to ensure the people of Wales have longer, healthier and happier lives, and are able to remain active and independent, in their own homes, for as long as possible.

The consultation will involve engagement activity across Wales, with feedback heard from the general public, health and social care professionals and other stakeholders used to help inform the final Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales strategy, due to be published in October 2019.

THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

As part of the consultation, we ran a series of regional engagement events across Wales from 28 January to 30 March 2019 and developed a number of mechanisms in order to seek views on those proposals and hear suggestions and ideas from the public. These included:

- Four events to launch the proposals in North, Mid, South East and South West Wales which were held during the evening and attracted a total of 110 people. The launches took the form of public meetings, with presentations on the proposals followed by facilitated table discussions and Q&A's. The meetings were recorded via note-takers on each of the tables as well as an audio recording.
- Four moderated focus groups which involved a cross-section of interested stakeholders and local people to discuss the key challenges and possible solutions. The focus groups were audio-recorded and full reports drafted on the findings.
- 15 deliberative events were run privately for local organisations with a direct interest in the proposals. The sessions saw groups taken through the proposals in detail and allowed them to ask questions and share their views and ideas. Notes were drafted detailing all comments made during the meeting.
- 12 information sessions to target specific groups of people. These saw our engagement teams give out details of the consultation, including consultation documents and booklets detailing the key issues, as well as chatting people through the proposals. These were in key public locations across Wales.
- Nine sessions at high footfall locations to capture views from the general public. Engagement teams were again on hand to give out information, speak to local people and take down comments and ideas.
- Comment cards were designed and distributed to enable people to write down their ideas. These were available for people to fill out and leave behind at the

launch event and also used during high footfall activity at key locations across Wales, with images of people taken with the comment cards to generate shareable content on social media that could help raise awareness of the consultation.

A series of communications tools and channels were used to help raise awareness of how people could take part in engagement activities, as well as to signpost people to the online consultation document and questionnaire, should they be unable to attend one of the engagement activities.

- We created and ran a series of bilingual Facebook adverts which gave details of the launch and high footfall and marketplace activity to encourage people to attend or visit our mobile teams to share their ideas. These were initially targeted at people living within a certain radius of the events. After events had taken place, an advert aimed at the four wider regions ran, with up-weighted targeting to reach priority audiences such as pregnant women, adolescents / teenagers and parents.
- A social media content plan containing a series of suggested social media posts was drafted detailing information on all the public events across the regions to encourage attendance, as well as general messages about the consultation, including the video clips of case studies.
- We designed an advert which ran in the newspapers with the highest circulation in the region, namely the Daily Post, the Powys County Times, the South Wales Echo and the South Wales Evening Post, to raise awareness of the local events. Welsh language digital ads also ran on Golwg 360 which gave dates of all the regional launch events.
- Four media releases were drafted for use on the Welsh Government website and to distribute to local media highlighting when and where local activities were taking place.

Engagement activities and responses during the engagement weeks included:

- **23 public or private stakeholder meetings** (including launch meetings, focus groups and deliberative events)
- **21 information or high footfall sessions** held in strategic locations or at key organisations designed to capture the views of both broad and specific groups of people, resulting in 705 face-to-face interactions
- **88 comment cards completed**
- **Through social media advertising** we reached **379,389** people, with **1,148,447** impressions. This included **504** social media shares, reactions and comments, and **3,725** click-through's.

Feedback from activity across Wales will be used to inform the final Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales strategy in October 2019.

SECTION 2 - THE ENGAGEMENT RESPONSES IN DETAIL

The engagement programme featured a number of engagement activities and mechanisms which allowed the general public, healthcare professionals, local community organisations and other stakeholders to learn or hear more about the proposals, ask any questions they may have and feedback their views.

All responses - including meeting notes, focus group reports, written submissions, comment cards and audio recordings - from the engagement will be made available to the Welsh Government during the decision-making process.

A detailed summary of what people told us via each of these activities, including the key themes that emerged, is set out below.

For more information about trends and themes during the four regional engagement weeks, please refer to the relevant report for that region.

2.1 Launch events

The launch events attracted 110 people made up of the general public, local voluntary organisations, charities and healthcare professionals. The meetings saw a series of short presentations from the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales outlining the proposals, before attendees took part in facilitated table discussions to share their opinions and ideas. The meetings concluded with plenary sessions to allow for final reflections and questions from the audience.

The following themes emerged as consistent issues:

- **Normalisation / lack of understanding:** One common discussion point at the launch events was that obesity has become normalised and people are no longer aware of what constitutes a 'healthy weight'. One respondent suggested that a more upfront approach with weight would help (while avoiding body-shaming). Another noted that BMI is partially to blame as it can provide confusing messages through a 'one size fits all' approach.
- **Improve on the '10 steps' programme:** Another prevalent point, especially in the *North* and *Mid Wales* launches, was that the '10 steps' programme doesn't go far enough. Many were critical of how it doesn't extend into later childhood, while others noted that it didn't seem clear whether the guidance was for parents or health professionals. One respondent noted that, despite its name, the programme fails to focus on the specific issue of maintaining a healthy weight.
- **SHEP limitations:** Similar to discussions on '10 steps', respondents largely praised SHEP but agreed that it is limited in scope at the moment. For many, there were

concerns about how SHEP doesn't extend beyond primary school, it is inaccessible for those in rural areas, and only operates in minimal 'out of hours' timeframes. There were also mixed views on how well children respond to it - with some saying it helps develop a passion for schools, and others saying that children avoid SHEP as it means they have to spend more time in school.

- **Safer routes for active travel:** Respondents, especially those from more rural areas, agreed that there is a lack of safe and well-lit cycle and footpaths across large parts of Wales, putting people off exercising. Respondents noted that this will need to be improved if active travel schemes can be implemented.

There were a number of particular issues or unique suggestions, such as:

- **School 'no-go zones':** One attendee said there should be a measurable 'no-go zone' around schools for fast food outlets, as well as mobile units (e.g. ice cream trucks).
- **Engage with farmers:** Another attendee said they were "*astounded that farmers weren't included (in the proposals).*" They suggested initiatives between farms and the community could be mutually beneficial, such as 'grow your own initiatives' with schools. Another attendee mentioned such a scheme is already underway in one school, where students look after community gardens, giving them a sense of involvement in their community, but more of this is needed.
- **Dietitians' divide:** Another interesting thought was the idea that dietitians are often seen as the enemy. One respondent noted there was a common rhetoric of "*us vs. them*" and an idea of "*don't eat that in front of the dietitian*". Bridging this divide, they said, would help improve people's understanding of obesity.
- **Welsh Government app:** One respondent suggested a Welsh Government created application, similar to 'Just Eat'. It could include a list of healthy restaurants, shops and facilities in one place.
- **Looking elsewhere - Hong Kong / Scandinavia:** During one conversation, two respondents discussed positive schemes in other countries. This included Hong Kong, where all students have 90 minutes for lunch, which the respondent noted made them feel more refreshed in the afternoon and more inclined to take part in evening activities. Another respondent noted the 'holistic' approach in Scandinavia, where children have one-to-one mentoring, which could be implemented.
- **Running track for new developments:** While talking about what can be done during development planning stages, one respondent suggested that all new builds should include a running track or other green space, to encourage fitness activity.

2.2 Public and high footfall events

A number of public information events were arranged, which saw engagement teams on hand at key locations to target both specific groups of people and the wider population. Members of the public were able to drop in to receive information about the consultation and proposals, as well as to share their ideas on how to tackle obesity with the team.

The following themes emerged as consistent issues:

- **Educate, don't ban:** One of the most common views was that stricter laws and banning things will not make the issue of obesity go away. Many suggested that the “*rebellious nature*” of children will mean any ban on energy drinks will make them want it more. Others argued that the education of parents, through outdoor projects or parent and child cooking groups, would improve the issue more than any bans.
- **Cost of healthy food:** Another common theme was that healthy food is too expensive for many low-income families. One respondent in *South East Wales* noted that it is often cheaper to take children to McDonald's for an evening, where they can have cheap food, access to free WiFi, and have the chance to meet friends, instead of going home. Conversely, farmers we spoke to at *Conwy Farmers' Market* suggested healthy food is actually very reasonably priced. This implied a disparity between the thoughts and knowledge of producers and consumers.
- **Fast food is too accessible:** A large number of respondents agreed that, as well as being cheap, fast food is very easily acceptable. This makes it difficult for busy people to avoid it. One respondent suggested that there should be investment in a healthy fast food alternative, while another said that fast food restaurants should be taxed more to raise prices and discourage people from visiting.
- **Energy drinks:** Lastly, a vast majority of respondents agreed that energy drinks should be banned for under 16's. Some argued a change in branding, similar to what has happened with cigarettes, would also work, as names like Rockstar and Monster are far too 'cool' and appealing for children. Another person noted that the ban should be increased to under 18s.

There were a number of particular issues or unique suggestions, such as:

- **Ban coffee for under 16s:** One respondent felt the energy drink ban didn't go far enough and noted spotting a number of young teenagers drinking highly-caffeinated coffees, too. A ban of selling coffee for under 16s would, in her view, resolve this.
- **Farm volunteering:** A dairy farmer at *Conwy Farmers' Market* suggested a scheme that encourages people to volunteer at local farms could be mutually

beneficial. This would enable people to get a workout for free, instead of gym costs, and support local farmers at the same time.

- **Stop NUS / student discounts on fast food:** A student at *Bangor University* suggested student discounts on fast food, such as McDonald's free student cheeseburger, played a large role in influencing what students should eat if they are in a rush. He told us that the NUS / universities should be accountable for this and replace such promotions with discounts for gyms / healthy alternatives.
- **Ban fast food advertising on bus tickets:** A student at *Bangor University* said he was shocked to see his young daughter's bus ticket with adverts and discount vouchers for fast food on it. He suggested this should be replaced with alternatives, such as discounted gym memberships.
- **Limit door drops:** Another respondent suggested that banning adverts isn't enough, and 'door drops' for unhealthy takeaways should be banned in Wales as well.
- **Utilise 'New Nectar':** One respondent at *University Wales Trinity Saint David* suggested a Welsh-based initiative to ensure supermarkets encourage people to live healthy lifestyles. He added that, with the introduction of the 'New Nectar' card to Wales only, this could be an opportunity for Sainsbury's to provide promotions or discounts for healthy alternatives.
- **Working with religious groups:** One Muslim respondent said that there are thousands of people that regularly attend Mosques in Swansea and suggested that an information session about obesity would be very insightful for these groups.

2.3 Private meetings and deliberative events

We held a number of deliberative events or private meetings for key groups of interest. The deliberative sessions saw groups taken through the proposals in detail and were asked to provide their views on the themes, and any ideas or suggestions they had, about what could be done to tackle obesity.

The following themes emerged as consistent issues:

- **Safer routes for active travel:** Similar to the launch events, many respondents raised concerns about the safety of walking and cycling routes, and whether active travel should be implemented, especially in rural areas. Respondents noted that any plans for active travel routes would need to be made in conjunction with new bike storage facilities, community showers, and so on. One respondent at *Flying Start* in Anglesey was cynical of the current infrastructure, stating: "*There aren't enough pavements in Anglesey, let alone cycle paths. What we do have aren't safe and there's a lot of anti-social behaviour.*"

- **Nutritional initiatives - but will they work?** Another common theme was around the development of nutritional initiatives, such as ‘Cook and Eat’ programmes, parent and child cooking sessions, or a Fitbit-style system to reward people who exercise frequently. However, during the *Mid Wales* events, there was a concern that funding for similar initiatives in the past has been cut, so they were sceptical that this might happen again.
- **Poor public transport:** Alongside concerns about active travel, respondents were also critical about public transport in rural areas, arguing that limited bus and train services discourage people from accessing countryside areas for walking and other activities. Some referred to the “*dominance of the car*” that reduces people’s physical activity.
- **Embrace the community:** Lastly, there was a focus on a need to invest in local community facilities and groups to ensure these plans work at a micro level. Many agreed that promoting local ‘community champions’, with accountability at a higher level, would benefit from this. Others argued that schools should be used as local ‘hubs’ and open out of hours as learning and activity centres for families.

There were a number of particular issues or unique suggestions, such as:

- **Built-in sugar and calorie counters on phones:** One respondent at a parent and toddler meeting mentioned most smart phones now have steps counters built into the device. She queried why manufacturers couldn’t do this for sugar and calorie tracking, allowing people to photograph, scan and track what they are eating and drinking.
- **Too much a focus on mums:** A respondent at *Aberystwyth University* felt the proposals focus too heavily on a mother’s input into a child’s development. She argued that, while the proposals could help mothers better understand a healthy diet for children, if fathers aren’t receiving the same advice, children may pick up bad habits from one side of the family. She added this would be especially prevalent in separated or same-sex relationships.
- **‘Healthy’ appraisals:** While at *Aberystwyth University*, a respondent suggested health-related objectives should be part of someone’s appraisal. Another respondent argued this would send a negative message, but they agreed that optional healthy workplace initiatives would benefit adults across Wales.
- **Free school meals ‘sliding scale’:** One attendee at the *Denbighshire Childcare Forum* noted that the ‘black and white’ approach to free school meals is unhelpful as there are many families on the threshold who are forced to supply packed lunches, which are often not as healthy. A ‘sliding scale’, for example half price for those around the threshold - could be beneficial.
- **Recipes in supermarkets:** An individual at the *Denbighshire Childcare Forum* suggested supermarkets trial an initiative which would see recipe ideas branded on

certain aisles, with all of the ingredients on corresponding shelves. These areas could also show the overall calorie count and cost for each suggested meal.

- **Geocaching:** One respondent in Treorchy suggested an investment in geocaching – the outdoor recreational activity that sees participants using GPS to ‘hide and seek’ containers in the environment. Considering Wales’ rurality, the respondent thought this could become an exciting initiative for youngsters across the country.

2.4 Focus groups

Four focus groups were held to capture views of a cross-section of people from the local population. Attendees were asked a number of questions about their views on the word ‘obesity’, opinions on the consultation’s four themes, and what they would prioritise if they were the Minister for Health and Social Services.

The following themes emerged as consistent issues:

- **Time-poor lifestyles:** Across the focus group events, the issue of people having a poor ‘work-life balance’ was commonly discussed. This, combined with a lack of education, has led to people becoming overly reliant on unhealthy meals. Comments included:
 - *“Both parents need to work now, whereas there used to be someone at home cooking, doing the housework etc. but now there are major time constraints which is the major problem of people shopping and eating for convenience.”*
 - *“With both partners working they may not have time to walk the kids to school so they’re dropped off [by car] and picked up, also they may go for quick meals like takeaway food. It’s a problem of the way we live today, the work/life balance.”*
 - *“There’s no time to cook and it’s all microwave – quicker and cheaper.”*
- **Cheap and convenient:** Further to discussions about work-life balances, a number of respondents added that the convenience and low cost of fast food makes it attractive for people. Comments included:
 - *“It’s very much about individual choices, but that is influenced by what’s out there, i.e. more convenience food available when we are time-poor.”*
 - *“You may know about portion sizes and the rest, but if you’ve had a stressful day you just eat you don’t want to know.”*
 - *“In canteens [in places of employment], chips are often cheaper than jacket potatoes.”*
- **Issue of manufacturers:** Another common theme was that manufacturers must be held accountable for the role they play in shaping what people eat and drink. Comments included:
 - *“I think that they’re [food manufacturers] not helping. I know when I go abroad, I can eat really healthily, very cheaply, but it’s much more*

expensive here.” Another added: “Convenience food is so easy to get here.”

- *“Sugar is in practically all processed foods, sugar and salt, if you buy the low salt, low sugar baked beans they taste horrible. Our bodies have been conditioned to want salt and sugar in our food.”*
- *“I think that food manufacturers deliberately put extra sugar and salt in to make us addicted to their products so we will buy more.”*

There were a number of particular issues or unique suggestions, such as:

- **Calorie tracking:** One participant suggested there’s an ignorance around calorie tracking and how to eat well. They summarised it in a unique way: *“Calories are like a bank balance - if you eat too much and don’t spend it, you’re putting it on.”*
- **Making health fun:** During a conversation about what the public sector can do to promote healthy lifestyles, one participant cited an example of a school in China where the Headmaster had adopted a dance form to encourage children to be more active.
- **Funded allotments:** One respondent suggested that the Welsh Government should *“set aside more land for people to have allotments [as] it’s good exercise and you get healthy food from it.”*

2.5 Comment cards and other written replies

In addition to verbal responses recorded at engagement events and activities mentioned, we also captured written responses, by encouraging respondents to complete comment cards.

The following themes emerged as consistent issues:

- **Fears about ambitious plans:** One common concern was that, while the plans are ambitious, budgets will likely not allow for them. Comments included:
 - *“Good ideas but in my experience [there is a] lack of funding for bodies on the ground to implement. Management may feel good about developing guidance on a national level, but those who have to implement with individual families don’t have long-term funding support.”*
 - *“All good and valid proposals and [it] would be lovely to see them all implemented, but funding is a HUGE barrier. Schemes such as ‘foodwise’ and NERS need continuous funding, not just 12 month contracts.”*
- **Restrict price promotions:** Another recurring theme was that supermarkets should be held responsible for the issue, especially the unhealthy promotions they regularly offer. One respondent suggested *“legally enforceable restrictions”* while another argued that *“HFSS (high in fat, sugar and salt) food and drinks should not be sold at checkouts”*.

- **Local champions:** Lastly, respondents agreed that the Welsh Government needs to support and fund provisions for ‘on the ground’ staff, who can see first-hand how the proposals are or aren’t working, and tweak accordingly. One noted there *“needs to be a balance between local authority budgets and the cost to the NHS”* while another said *“implementation boards only work with feet on the ground. Spend six months making people passionate and they’ll do the job for you!”*. Others added that these champions should be a mixture of youth and adult ambassadors.

There were a number of particular issues or unique suggestions, such as:

- **Support for pregnant women:** Another respondent emphasised that it is *“integral to support women during their perinatal period.”* This includes *“healthy eating, not eating for two [and] cooking nutritious meals on a budget.”*
- **Junk mail:** Similar to a point raised during a high footfall event, one respondent noted that we should *“restrict junk mail for junk food”*.
- **Celebrity influence:** One respondent noted that *“families [are] influenced by celebrity”* so why not position them as *“health champions”*? They noted this could be promoted through social media channels.

We also had an email response as a follow up from a conversation with a particularly engaged member of the public in **North Wales**. She said:

“Classic psychological studies, such as Bandura (1961), as well as more recent studies (Connolly, 2017), have shown that children can be influenced through role models. Applying that to encouraging children to eat healthy, athletes or chefs could make appearances in school to talk to children about the benefits of living a healthy lifestyle and how that role model has benefited from this.”

The individual also cited studies which show people are more likely to engage in behaviour that they believe others around them are adopted, and therefore *“healthy eating should be promoted as an ‘everyday’ thing that most people do, rather than discussing the raising rate of obesity in UK children as this will highlight how many people are not actually living this healthy lifestyle we are trying to promote.”*

SECTION 3: KEY THEMES

Across all elements of engagement - whether expressed at a public or private meeting, or through written submissions - there were several common themes which were clearly reoccurring.

We have broken these themes into five broader areas:

- **Cost and convenience:** The most common theme among the engagement events was that unhealthy food is cheap and quick, making it an attractive option for busy

people. This is largely due to the 'time poor' lifestyles that many working parents have. One respondent suggested that there should be investment in a healthy fast food alternative, while another said that fast food restaurants should be taxed more to raise prices and discourage people from visiting. However, not everyone agreed with this - farmers at **Conwy Farmers' Market** suggested healthy food is actually very reasonably priced. This implied a disparity between the thoughts and knowledge of producers and consumers.

- **Safer routes for active travel:** Another common topic across all events - especially those in rural areas - was about a lack of safe and well-lit cycle and footpaths across large parts of Wales, putting people off exercising. Respondents noted that this will need to be improved if active travel schemes can be implemented, while others said that any plans for active travel routes would need to be made in conjunction with new bike storage facilities, community showers, and so on.
- **Embrace the community:** Respondents agreed that there needs to be investment in local community facilities and 'on the ground' staff to ensure these plans work at a micro level. Many agreed that promoting local 'community champions' - of all ages and with accountability at a higher level - would benefit from this. Others argued that schools should be used as local 'hubs' and open out of hours as learning and activity centres for families.
- **Price promotion / role of manufacturers:** There was a common consensus that supermarkets and manufacturers need to take responsibility for the issue of obesity in Wales. This included discussions around price promotions, with one respondent suggesting "*legally enforceable restrictions*" on supermarkets, with another arguing that "*HFSS (high in fat, sugar and salt) food and drinks should not be sold at checkouts*".
- **Normalisation / lack of understanding:** Lastly, respondents often discussed how obesity has become normalised and people are no longer aware of what constitutes a 'healthy weight'. One respondent suggested that a more upfront approach with weight would help (while avoiding body-shaming), while others argued that the education of parents is vital. Another noted that BMI is partially to blame as it can provide confusing messages through a 'one size fits all' approach.