

WELSH GOVERNMENT INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Title of proposal:	Legislative proposals to make the food environment in Wales healthier
Official(s) completing the Integrated Impact Assessment (name(s) and name of team):	Nathan Cook, Healthy and Active Team Alison Black, Healthy and Active Team
Department:	Public Health Prevention and Promotion, Directorate of Health and Wellbeing
Head of Division/SRO (name):	Ed Wilson
Cabinet Secretary/Minister responsible:	Lynne Neagle, Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing
Start Date:	26 May 2022

What action is the Welsh Government considering and why?

From 26 May we will be consulting on proposals to make the food environment in Wales healthier by shifting the balance to make it easier for people to make healthier food choices. A further consultation will be launched on 9 June to end the sale of energy drinks to children under 16.

Background

[Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales¹](#) sets out our 10-year strategy and vision to prevent and reduce obesity across Wales. There are approximately 1.6m adults who are overweight and 655,000 who are obese in Wales and more than one in four of our children are overweight or obese when they start primary school. Data shows that children and adults in Wales are not eating balanced diets. We consume too much sugar, saturated fat and salt and too many calories, but not enough fibre, fruit and vegetables. For example, children between 11 to 18 years old consume up to three times the recommended maximum amount of sugar.ⁱⁱ The need for action is clear.

Preventing obesity is a complex challenge, with many contributing factors acting at individual, community, societal and global levels. Our food environment has developed in a way which prioritises convenience over health. This includes a focus on easy, quick foods that will often be energy dense and high in fat and/or sugar and are sometimes more affordable. Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales sets out our commitment to shift the food environment towards making the healthy choice, the easy choice.

The Food Environment

Our food environment plays a central role in what we choose to eat and drink. We are never far away from calorie dense, sugary or fat-rich temptation. In our everyday lives we are exposed to advertising, promotions and pricing which push us further towards making unhealthy choices. We have created an environment where the healthy choice is not always the easy choice.

Our eating patterns have also changed. We 'eat out' and 'order in' more frequently and snack more often. Food is available 24 hours a day and we rely less on cooking from scratch or having three set meals a day. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic around one in five meals were eaten outside of the home and portions are bigger and generally contain more calories, fat, sugar and salt.

We want people to think about the food and drink they purchase and consume within the course of a typical week. We want to take action across the food environment to consider changes which will enable our food choices to shift towards enabling better dietary health. Central to these considerations will be the role which poverty plays on our food choices and how we can use our powers to help narrow the inequality gap based on dietary and nutritional outcomes.

What do we want to consider?

The proposals we are exploring are;

- Healthier Shopping Baskets – to restrict all prime location placement and; price, volume and multi buy promotions in healthier products in food and drink retailers.
- Healthier Eating out of our Homes – to mandate calorie labelling at the point of sale and restrict serving sizes of sugary soft drinks in the out of home sector.
- Healthier Local Food Environments – to seek views on what further support could be provided to help improve the availability of healthy food in local communities and, whether existing planning and licensing support should be reviewed including guidance to address the distribution of HFTs, particularly close to Secondary Schools and Colleges.
- Energy Drink Restrictions - to restrict the sale to under 16 year olds.

From 26 May to 18 Aug 2022 (Healthy Food Environment) and from 9 June to 1 September (Energy Drinks) we will be consulting on these proposals to establish consumer and industry response to such changes and assess the likely impacts.

These proposals are interconnected and support wider action on food sustainability and climate change and, align with our [Net Zero strategy](#)ⁱⁱⁱ. They are intended to be part of an initial set of measures to improve our food environment. We will monitor their impact in parallel with a range of other measures which are set out in Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales, and will review our actions accordingly.

Delivery against Programme for Government & well-being objectives

The Programme for Government commits us to create a 21st century NHS by investing in the post-Covid recovery, tackling health inequalities, improving mental health provision and focussing on prevention. These proposals will help the Welsh Government respond to the urgent issue of obesity and reflect and respond to the following;

- Obesity is on track to shortly overtake smoking as the biggest cause of preventable premature death. There are a number of chronic conditions linked to obesity, for example more than 209,015 people in Wales are now living with diabetes. This is 8% of the population aged 17 and over - the highest prevalence in the UK - and the numbers are rising every year. This increased trend is associated with dietary habits.
- It has been estimated that the indirect cost to the UK economy from obesity related conditions is around £27 billion per year with some estimates placing this figure much higher. It is estimated that obesity-related conditions are currently costing the NHS across the UK £6.1 billion per year.
- COVID-19 has brought the dangers of obesity into sharper focus, with evidence demonstrating that those who are overweight or living with obesity have been at greater risk of being seriously ill and dying from the virus. Furthermore, the

pandemic has exacerbated already existing health inequalities related to dietary behaviours.

- Over a quarter of children in Wales are obese or overweight by the time they start primary school aged five, and this rises to one third by the time they leave primary school. Children are significantly more likely than the Welsh average to be obese, if they live in areas of higher deprivation.
- A shift in dietary habits is linked with the Net Zero Plan and a shift in dietary behaviours in line with the Eatwell Guide can make a substantial contribution.

Voluntary action by industry to support the public to make healthier choices (reformulation, nutrition labelling etc.) has not been delivered consistently nor have the desired impact on dietary shift. These proposals will ensure a level playing field, mandate the provision of information, restrict promotion of unhealthy food and incentivise healthy reformulation.

These proposals will play a significant role in delivering against a commitment to reduce health inequalities and support a sustained focus on the role of prevention and recovery from the pandemic.

Future Generations

We will embrace and use the five ways of working set out in the Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 as our guiding principles to deliver the Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales strategy. This will allow us to develop a systems based approach which enables leadership at every level and will maximise the impact upon people's lived experiences in Wales for current and future generations.

Long-term

We will be bold and test new ways of doing things and learn as we go to continuously improve. We will use the best available evidence to embed a range of effective interventions to support the conditions required to impact on our nation's health in the long-term. This consultation aims to consider how we can shift the environment towards healthier options as part of a multi-component approach which focus upon how we can achieve our ten year aims set out in Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales.

Prevention

We are working to ensure that prevention is a central consideration and will build a comprehensive system which provides leadership at every level. This consultation aims to enable people to make healthier food choice and to take away triggers which are provided within the food environment, which shifts us towards buying food which is poor for our dietary health.

Integration

A whole government approach across a range of departments will be evident through delivery. We will link delivery to the seven well-being goals and work with public bodies to bring together a range of policy goals. The consultation aims to consider how we can work with a range of stakeholders to achieve our aims and to build forward in an approach which considers the wider food system. We will work closely with industry to achieve these aims.

Collaboration

We will create the right conditions for transformative ideas and collaboration to flourish. We will support and enable our key national partners and organisations such as to progress key actions. Work in partnership with Regional Partnership Boards and Public Service Boards (including Local Government and Local Health Boards) to develop transformative ways of working and to drive collective leadership with a particular focus upon prevention. Enable grassroots action to take place within communities so that our third sector, community partners and leaders across settings such as schools, leisure settings and workplaces can develop new ideas or scale existing approaches which are already having a positive impact. The consultation will aim to engage broadly, so we can refine policy options.

Costs and Savings

Estimations of costs through the consultation have been calculated and included in the Impact Assessment as part of the consultation.

Conclusion

The consultation will have appeal across the population, as well as having a potential impact across certain groups. We intend to provide stakeholder and public engagement on both of the consultations. This will include:

- stakeholder events aimed at the food industry and non-governmental organisation (NGOs)
- focus groups aimed at our public priority groups
- wider public engagement to include roadshow events

The stakeholder engagement events will aim to capture in-depth stakeholder feedback and insight of food industry and NGO representatives. The focus groups will be aimed at the following priority groups:

- older primary aged children (age 10 – 11)
- secondary aged children
- young people (age 16 – 25)
- parents and carers (from babies to teenagers)
- people from socio-economic groups C1, C2, D and E
- people on weight loss journeys
- people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds
- people aged 45 and over.

The wider public engagement should include a multi-media campaign to raise awareness of the consultations and trigger a national conversation. This will include regional roadshows at high-footfall venues.

What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

The impacts of the consultation are intending to develop a healthier food environment to enable the healthier choice, to be the easy choice. This is part of a multi-component approach set out in the national Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales strategy and compliments our overall approach to address both environmental and behavioural change aspects to help reduce and prevent obesity across Wales.

We know that obesity is now one of the main preventable causes of premature death. If current trends continue more people in Wales will die prematurely due to cancer, heart disease, liver disease and diabetes. More lives will be adversely affected by disability and ill health. Obesity also impacts negatively on our mental health which in many cases tracks with us from a young age and has life-long consequences and impacts. We have seen how a pandemic like COVID-19 has exposed health inequalities, affecting obesity and the communities where obesity prevalence is higher in a disproportionate way.

At a population level we are purchasing and consuming too many foods which are high in fat, salt and sugar. This is having an adverse impact upon our health and we wish to change the food environment to enable a shift in dietary behaviours.

We do not wish to increase the cost of living for people and we know that many products on promotion can actually increase the cost of a weekly shop. However, we wish to consider any adverse impacts this may place upon groups from lower economic backgrounds within the consultation and will be engaging with people to understand any perceived barriers or issues.

We also know that obesity has an impact on people with disabilities and in relation to race with higher obesity rates across populations. We will be undertaking targeted engagement to consider these specific impacts.

We also wish to consider the broader economic impacts of the consultation and have published impact assessments alongside this consultation. In particular we wish to consider any impacts to businesses and have asked specific questions in the consultation to consider the type of support which may be required.

In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals; and/or, avoid, reduce and mitigate any negative impacts?

Reducing obesity and overweight rates across the population will be a key outcome and this consultation will help to significantly contribute towards achieving the aims set out in the ten year Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales Strategy. It will not only improve lives by preventing obesity related illnesses and deaths, but it will support a healthier, more equal society for all.

We are engaging with a range of stakeholders and people who will be most impacted by the measures set out in the strategy and its delivery plans to mitigate any negative impacts.

How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?

There will be a robust evaluation put in place following the introduction of future legislation. This will aim to understand the health benefits of any changes in the food environment. This will consider the use of data and cost analysis to inform future decision making.

ⁱ Welsh Government. (2019). Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales

ⁱⁱ Welsh Government. (2019). National Diet and Nutrition Survey: results for Years 5 to 9 of the Rolling Programme for Wales (2012/2013 – 2016/2017) and time trend and income analysis (Years 1 to 9; 2008/09 – 2016/17)

ⁱⁱⁱ Welsh Government. (2021) Working together to reach Net Zero.