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The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP



Child healthy weight matters – we need bold and urgent action to deliver healthy weight for all children in Scotland.

Dear Ministers,

We are writing to you regarding our significant concerns over a lack of policy action to deliver healthy diet and weight outcomes for children in Scotland.

Last year marked the fifth anniversary of the Scottish Government's ambition to halve the rate of childhood obesity in Scotland by 2030. However, the past five years have seen the health of Scotland's children move in a concerning direction. The latest statistics from the Scottish Health Survey show that one in every three children are at risk of developing overweight and obesity - the highest levels recorded since 2011. During the peak pandemic years, we saw a record proportion of children starting primary school at risk of developing obesity (16%), and the latest figures show that rates are still in a worse position than before the pandemic took effect. These developments are also underpinned by persistent inequalities in children's weight outcomes, which are determined by the level of deprivation they face when growing up.

Behind all of the statistics are children and young people who face worsening short and long-term health problems due to their weight. Issues associated with overweight and obesity in childhood are both physical and mental, but most importantly can contribute to cutting a life short. We see this as unacceptable in a country such as Scotland with the knowledge that this is preventable and the resources available which would enable us to change direction.

It is now time to take bold and urgent action. We urge the Scottish Government to champion measures that will protect children in Scotland and their long-term futures. The evidence-based actions outlined in the 2018 *Diet and Healthy Weight Delivery Plan* are promising, and they would go a long way in helping improve the situation for thousands of children and young people. Commitments in the delivery plan include:

- Regulating retail promotions of high fat, sugar, and salt products. It is vital this upcoming intervention is robust and free from industry influence in order to create the desired effect on children's health. We cannot afford to pass a policy that undermines its primary goal.
- Developing a code of practice for the restriction of unhealthy food and drink advertising outdoors. There has been no evidence that this measure has progressed.
- Developing and implementing an Out of Home strategy to ensure the sector is healthier for customers. Despite the *Eating Out, Eating Well* framework currently being piloted, the slow progress and voluntary nature of the strategy means it will not achieve the immediate improvement that our children's health requires.

To date there has been limited progress with each of these policies as well as the wider strategy.



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Actively engaging with this important issue which affects the whole of Scotland would set a strong precedent for the government's growing movement towards a wellbeing economy. Today's children will shape the success of the country for decades to come, and protecting their health is essential for the foundations of a wellbeing economy. This is a real opportunity to demonstrate that health and wellbeing will be a national priority going forward.

Over the last eight months, Obesity Action Scotland has been campaigning and asking people to pledge that child healthy weight matters to them. Over 30 MSPs and 22 organisations and individuals from across Scotland and the UK have now taken that pledge. Additionally, the signatories on this letter are signed up to support and advocate for improved action on children's health. There is also growing evidence to show that the public would like to see more intervention from its leaders to improve health. A 2023 report commissioned by The Health Foundation found 86% of people in Scotland want greater action to tackle health inequalities. The need has never been greater, and Scotland recognises it.

Child healthy weight matters to all the signatories of this letter, and we hope to see action that indicates it also matters to you. We encourage you to set a precedent in delivering a healthy weight childhood for all children in Scotland and take the bold and urgent policy action needed to achieve this.

Signed

Organisations

Obesity Action Scotland

Scottish Obesity Alliance

NCD Alliance Scotland

British Heart Foundation Scotland

MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow

The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

British Dental Association

The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh

Consensus Action on Salt, Sugar and Health

Voluntary Health Scotland



Nesta

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Scotland

Diabetes Scotland

The Breastfeeding Network

UK Faculty of Public Health

Alcohol Focus Scotland

Individuals

Miss Jessica Large, StR Paediatric Dentistry, Charles Clifford Dental Hospital, Sheffield (formerly Edinburgh Dental Institute); Doctoral student, Loughborough University

Dr Robert Donald, Chair of BDA Scottish Council

Prof. Rowan Parks, President of The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh

Prof. Grant McIntyre, Dean of the Faculty of Dental Surgery, The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh

Dr Jenny Gillespie, Senior Health Promotion Officer, Directorate of Public Health, NHS Tayside

