

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol ar Atal iechyd gwael - gordewdra](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on [Prevention of ill health - obesity](#)

OB17 : Ymateb gan: Beat | Response from: Beat



Beat's Response to the Health and Social Care Committee Inquiry into the Prevention of Obesity

Beat is the eating disorder charity. We exist to end the pain and suffering caused by these devastating mental illnesses.

Eating disorders are a growing mental health crisis. Right now, around 1.25m people in the UK are living with an eating disorder. That's more than one in 50 people and the emotional and physical damage affects millions of loved ones.

As a charity supporting individuals and families affected by eating disorders, our priority is mitigating potential harms to the people we work with. Obesity and eating disorders are not separate issues, and both are complex. In 2020 Beat published a report on the [risks to people with eating disorders caused by government anti-obesity strategies](#).

Beat has welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the work of the 'Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales' programme.

The Welsh Government and public health leaders should continue to consult with Beat and other eating disorder experts, including experts by experience, in its continued implementation of the policies outlined in the 'Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales' anti-obesity strategy and delivery plan.

Gaps/areas for improvement in existing policy and the current regulatory framework (including in relation to food/nutrition and physical activity)

Beat welcomed the Welsh Government's decision in June 2023 to pause the introduction of calorie labelling on menus, until more evidence is gathered on the impact of such legislation on people with eating disorders. Should this evidence show that calorie labelling on menus causes harm, **then such a policy should not be introduced**. Our full briefing about the impact of calorie labelling on menus is available [here](#).

interventions in pregnancy and early childhood to promote good nutrition and prevent obesity

Children are particularly vulnerable to developing eating disorders, especially those who are prone to anxiety or those who are worried about being overweight. Beat's 2020 report on the [risks to people with eating disorders caused by government anti-obesity strategies](#) examines the impact that education around 'healthy'/'good' and 'unhealthy'/'bad' foods, calorie restrictions and school-based weight measurement programmes can have on children and their families.

The report found that public health messages across the UK and nutritional information commonly targeted at children commonly portray that certain foods should be avoided or are "bad". Treatment for an eating disorder often involves supporting the person to introduce foods that they are avoiding due to fears such as that the food will make them "fat". The person is encouraged to view food in a more balanced way with the idea that there are no inherently "good" or "bad" foods, and that all foods are healthy if eaten in a balanced way.

The report also found that school-based weight measurement programmes achieve little or nothing in their aim of reducing obesity, but that they do pose a significant risk to those vulnerable to eating disorders.

people's ability to access appropriate support and treatment services for obesity

People can have an eating disorder at any weight, and it is important that every part of the treatment pathway includes screening for eating disorders, that the services have established links to eating disorder services, and that treatment services regularly check in with patients about their thoughts and feelings around food.

[Research shows that early intervention](#) is vital to a full and sustained recovery from an eating disorder, and healthcare professionals must be equipped to identify early signs of a potential eating disorder.