

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](#)

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Prevention of ill health - obesity. Consultation response

Nesta is the UK's innovation agency for social good. We design, test and scale new solutions to society's biggest problems. One of Nesta's three Missions is to increase the average number of healthy years lived in the UK, while narrowing health inequalities. In order to do this, we have chosen to focus on obesity, because it is one of the most common causes of preventable death and ill health.

This document is Nesta's response to the Consultation put out by the Health and Social Care Committee to support its inquiry into the prevention of ill-health - obesity.

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A focus on food environments in Wales that makes the healthy choice the easy choice

Previous policies across the UK nations, which primarily rely on individual willpower, information dissemination, and exercise encouragement, have fallen short. [Analysis by Nesta](#) suggests that in 2022-2023, a third of the population in Wales was living with obesity (34%).

The crux of the issue lies not in people's motivation to shed weight—evidence shows that 38% of UK adults are actively trying—nor is it reasonable to suggest that the doubling of obesity rates over the last 30 years could be explained by a decrease in people's [willpower](#).

To halve obesity requires only small changes to diets. A person living with excess weight needs to reduce their calorie intake [by only 8.5% or 216 calories per day](#). This is a relatively modest shift and suggests that obesity is a solvable problem, yet we know that existing policies are not meeting the scale of this challenge.

We believe the most equitable, sustainable and feasible way of reducing obesity prevalence is by improving the food environment. We know that our diets are heavily influenced by many factors in the food environment including [the price, availability and convenience of food, prompts in our environment like advertising, product placement and density of places selling unhealthy foods.](#)

Whilst no one single policy that the Welsh Government can implement will lead to a halving of the prevalence of obesity, through the layering of multiple policies it would be possible to significantly reduce obesity prevalence through small iterative changes which do not require a reimagining of society and through which food would remain equally joyful.

To reduce obesity by changing our food environment the Welsh Government must focus their efforts on a range of policies that increase the availability, accessibility and affordability of healthy food for everyone. To do this, we outline nine recommendations for the Welsh Government on how they can make positive changes to the food environment in Wales. These recommendations draw on insights from [ongoing work by Nesta and a panel of scientific experts to calculate the relative impact of different interventions to reduce obesity.](#)

Food environment	Lead by example	Drive collaboration across the UK
Price, availability and convenience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Enhancing catering and hospitality through effective public procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mandatory healthy food targets for retailersImplement broad levy on salt and sugar
Advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Guidance on advertising food and drink on public land and assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">TV and online advertising restrictions
Understanding the challenge and progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Adjust for self-reported adult obesity ratesMonitor compliance with school food nutrition standardsExtend the Child Measurement Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mandate industry reporting of nutritional profile and food sales

Price, availability and convenience

Nesta is supportive of Welsh Government's pending legislation restricting placement and price promotions on high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) products, and would urge them to ensure these are implemented without delay. However, achieving the scale of obesity reduction needed in Wales requires new, bolder policies.

- Mandatory healthy food targets for UK's biggest retailers**

A specific policy which [Nesta research](#) has suggested would be particularly impactful is the introduction of new mandatory targets to incentivise large grocery retailers to offer healthier food options, and discourage business models that rely on pushing people to fatty foods and sugary snacks. Modelling by Nesta estimates that setting health targets for the 11 largest grocery retailers at levels similar to that already achieved by today's 'best' players could reduce calorie purchases among the UK population with excess weight by around 80 kcal per person per day and cut obesity prevalence by approximately 23%.

The Welsh Government should drive collaboration across the four nations to introduce such mandatory health targets for large grocery retailers across the UK. Alternatively, the Welsh Government could investigate using Welsh legislation to implement mandatory healthy food targets in Wales.

- Collaborate to implement broad levy on salt and sugar.**

It is estimated that creating a tax of [£3/kg on sugar and a £6/kg on salt, would reduce the average calories eaten per person per day by 15-38 calories](#). There is evidence of public support for such an initiative in Wales, where a recent Public Health Wales Time To Talk survey reported that [57% of people](#) agreed that governments should use financial tools like taxes to reduce sugar in foods.

- Enhancing catering and hospitality through effective public procurement**

Public institutions such as hospitals, schools, prisons, social care facilities, and other public sector workplaces serve a significant number of meals daily. Public bodies have an opportunity to both improve the diets of a large number of people; as well as to set an example to other sectors, with the aim of encouraging them to follow suit by improving the healthiness of the food they offer. To achieve this, Nesta recommends that the Welsh Government

mandate the inclusion of health-based standards in public food procurement. This could build on the current '[Buying Food Fit for the Future](#)' initiative which currently focuses on local/sustainable procurement; alongside [the standards Cardiff and Vale Health Board have already developed](#) for commercial and retail food outlets on their premises which ensure that at least 75% of the food and drink sold at outlets to staff, patients and visitors are healthy.

Advertising

- **Provide national guidance on advertising food and drink on public land and assets**

[Advertising impacts what we buy and eat, which in turn affects our body weight and risk of obesity](#). The UK Government is currently focused on introducing restrictions on advertising of HFSS products on TV and online. While Nesta are supportive of this policy there is further opportunity to improve diets through restrictions on outdoor advertising for HFSS products (e.g. bus stops and billboards). Evidence suggests that outdoor food advertising has a [similar impact on food cravings as online advertising](#), and [an evaluation of Transport for London's policy](#) to ban the advertising of HFSS on its spaces has shown that such restrictions can have a large impact on people's diets, reducing the average weekly household purchase by 385 kcal. Welsh Government should build on the [policies being developed in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan](#) by providing national guidance to public bodies across Wales encouraging them to prohibit HFSS product advertising on publicly-owned spaces through internal policies and explore how privately owned advertising spaces can be regulated through planning regulations.

- **Collaborate to ban on HFSS advertising online and TV pre-9pm**

The Welsh Government should take a strong stance on the implementation of HFSS advertising restrictions as a key public health measure. While the rising cost of living is a concern to industry, the long-term health benefits of curbing obesity outweigh short-term economic pressures. The Welsh Government should emphasise this in its communication with the UK Government, and offer to work with them to develop solutions that minimise disruption for businesses while adhering to the implementation timeline.

Understanding the challenge

- **Adjust self-reported obesity data**

Report future adult obesity prevalence data from National Survey for Wales [with adjustments made to correct for self-report error](#) (as is already the approach taken in other parts of the UK), retrospectively adjusting data from previous years to give an accurate picture of how obesity rates have changed over time.

- **Implement data infrastructure that mandates in legislation the collection and public reporting of industry-wide food sales data**

Work collaboratively across the four nations to mandate medium to large food retailers to share data on the nutritional profile and sales of products through the Food Data Transparency Partnership (FDTP).

- **Monitoring and supporting Free School Meals**

[Evidence suggests that school meals are typically healthier than packed lunches](#), the introduction of UPFSM could therefore play an important role in improving children's diets in Wales. However, for the full potential of these benefits to be realised, it is essential that school meals both meet high health standards and that a high proportion of pupils take-up this offer.

Although school food nutritional standards are in place, there are concerns that some catering providers may not always be fully complying with these. Nesta advises that the Welsh Government should develop new processes to more robustly monitor compliance with these standards on a regular basis.

Uptake of free school meals following the introduction of UPFSM has been lower than expected. The Welsh Government should make increasing uptake of free school meals a priority. Where uptake falls below a sufficient level, they should [build on the work of Nesta](#) and other stakeholders to explore ways to increase uptake.

- **Extend the Child Measurement Programme**

Extend the Child Measurement Programme to also include collection of height and weight data from older children i.e. 10 – 11 year olds (as is already the case in other parts of the UK) allowing tracking of how obesity develops across childhood.

Conclusion

A drive to halve obesity would make a significant contribution to increasing healthy life expectancy, narrowing health inequalities and relieving pressure on the NHS than almost any other policy. For too long, we have failed to make an impact by focusing on solutions that rely on individual willpower or voluntary action from industry. There are viable policy alternatives which focus on small changes to the food environment which could make huge strides forward - our innovative proposal for health targets for retailers is one of them.