

Briefing Paper – Obesity

The Development of a Peninsula Wide Healthy Weight Strategy (Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, Devon, Plymouth and Torbay)

For the attention of: Health and Wellbeing Board, Local Authorities, Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), Healthwatch, Public Health England, NHS Commissioning Board.

Key Points

- Obesity is an important cause of ill health and premature mortality.
- Obesity levels have increased significantly since the mid 1990s and obesity is predicted to affect more than half of adults and a quarter of children by 2050.
- The annual costs of obesity to society are an estimated £2 billion in Peninsula.
- There is a need for coordinated action and leadership at local community and strategic level.
- A Peninsula Healthy Weight Network has formed to bring together all organisations with a responsibility for promoting a healthy weight and commissioning support services.
- This Network plans to develop a Peninsula Wide Healthy Weight Strategy, with locally developed action plans linked to Health and Wellbeing Boards.

What is the issue?

Obesity, diet and lack of physical activity are, after smoking, the most important causes of ill health and premature death. Obesity substantially contributes to the risks of hypertension, diabetes and heart disease, respiratory problems, several cancers, Alzheimer's disease and renal failure. Morbid obesity is associated with 9 years loss of life – equivalent to life-long smoking. If trends continued at the current rates it is estimated that 60 per cent of men, 50 per cent of women and 25 per cent of under-20-year-olds could be obese by 2050¹.

There is particular concern about the rise of childhood obesity and the implications of such obesity persisting into adulthood. Obese children may also suffer psychological problems such as social isolation, low self-esteem, teasing and bullying. Obesity among children and young people is closely linked with socioeconomic status. Children from more deprived backgrounds have higher levels of obesity.

In 2015 the annual costs to the NHS of diseases related to overweight and obesity (BMI >25kg/m² or more) in the Peninsula is estimated to reach £495.5 million (half a £billion). When indirect costs (such as loss of earnings) are included, obesity costs society an estimated £2,016.7 million (£2 billion) in the Peninsula².

¹ Tackling Obesity: Futures Choices - Foresight Report (2007)

² National Heart Forum (2008), Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: a toolkit for developing local strategies, Costing tool.

What have we done so far?

From 2006 *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives : A cross governmental strategy for England*³ provided a framework for tackling excess weight nationally through five key themes and targets. However, *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A call to action on obesity in England*⁴ (DoH, 2011) emphasises the limitations of top down approaches and the need for local leaders and communities to take their own decisions. The Public Health Outcomes Framework will measure progress on excess weight, physical activity and diet as well as premature mortality associated with obesity⁵.

In the Peninsula each locality has taken a different approach to 'promoting healthy weight' or 'tackling obesity', in very different contexts. However, not one local area in England has yet achieved a reversal in the upward trend in obesity. This will take long term strategic action. As public health teams move into local authorities this is an opportunity to raise the profile of obesity, showcase the best from each locality, and take a coordinated and cooperative approach. The most recent NICE guidance *Obesity: Working with local communities*⁶ recommends coordinated action and leadership at local community and strategic level.

What we plan to do

A *Peninsula Healthy Weight Network* has been established which aims to bring together all organisations with a responsibility for promoting a healthy weight and commissioning support services. These should include: Local Authority Public Health; CCGs; Public Health England and the NHS Commissioning Board.

This Network plans (in principle) to develop a Peninsula wide Healthy Weight Strategy to promote Healthy Weight through developing shared strategic objectives and intelligence. This Network will not replace local decision making since action plans will be agreed with stakeholders locally and link to local Health and Wellbeing Boards.

We will keep you informed of progress with regular updates if you request this.

What we would like you to do

1. Note the key points of this briefing and the importance of obesity as one of the leading causes of premature death in the population.
2. Recognise that we all have a role in ensuring our local environment, communities, workplaces/schools and family lives promote a healthy weight.
3. Raise the profile of healthy weight within your organisation and workforce; we suggest you designate a 'champion' to lead on behalf of your organisation.
4. Feedback your views to us following this briefing and let us know if you would like to receive updates rachel.wigglesworth@nhs.net

³ Department of Health (2006) *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives : A cross governmental strategy for England*

⁴ Department of Health (2011) *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A call to action on obesity in England*

⁵ Department of Health (2012) *A Public Health Outcomes Framework for England 2013-16*

⁶ National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) (2012), Public Health Guidance 42, *Obesity: Working with local communities*