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## **RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION ON GREEN PAPER ON HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

Attn: European Commission  
Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection  
Unit C4 – Health Determinants  
L-2920 Luxembourg

The Andalucía School of Public Health's European Health Observatory is a project of the Regional Ministry of Health of the Junta de Andalucía (Spain) charged with obtaining and disseminating information on the policies, programmes and decisions at EU level that have repercussions for the Andalucía Health Service, and with developing strategies and activities enabling these to be incorporated and put to practical use.

The European Health Observatory has drawn up this document in response to the invitation to take part in the public consultation launched by the European Commission with the Green Paper "Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases".

We will follow the same order as the chapters and paragraphs included in the cited document, reproducing the text of the questions (in bold) and responding to those questions where we consider that we can make a contribution.

### **IV. STRUCTURES AND TOOLS AT COMMUNITY LEVEL**

#### **IV.3. Health across EU policies**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions:

***– What are the concrete contributions which Community policies, if any, should make towards the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity, and towards creating environments which make healthy choices easy choices?***

Community policies should mainstream nutritional health and physical activity in order to contribute to promoting them and assess the impact of their activities on the population's dietary habits and physical activity.

*Agriculture:* encourage the cultivation of healthy products, provide tax incentives

for the production of healthy foods or grants enabling farmers to reduce costs and lower the final price to the public.

*Education:* promote training in nutrition and health among both health professionals and education professionals, support projects intended to encourage healthy lifestyles in educational institutions, pool best practice in this area, support initiatives where young people can act as health mediators, create fora for exchanging experiences.

***– Which kind of Community or national measures could contribute towards improving the attractiveness, availability, accessibility and affordability of fruits and vegetables?***

***– On which areas related to nutrition, physical activity, the development of tools for the analysis of related disorders, and consumer behaviour is more research needed?***

- Research to gain an understanding of consumer behaviour in relation to food and physical activity.
- Research into the influence of socio-economic and cultural factors on the adoption of healthy lifestyles.

#### **IV. 4. The Public Health Action Programme**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions:

***– How can the availability and comparability of data on obesity be improved, in particular with a view to determining the precise geographical and socioeconomic distribution of this condition?***

With a view to obtaining objective data:

- Systematic detection of obesity by health services.
- Systematic collection of data on obesity by the healthcare sector.
- Preparation by health services of socio-health and socio-demographic profiles of obese patients using methodology that is standardised and homogeneous across the Member States.
- Creation of an accessible web page with the information.

***– How can the programme contribute to raising the awareness of the potential which healthy dietary habits and physical activity have for reducing the risk for chronic diseases amongst decision makers, health professionals, the media and the public at large?***

Possible activities:

- Include lifestyle indicators related to physical activity and healthy eating in the context of "European Community Health Indicators" (ECHI shortlist), and the association of these with chronic diseases (cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory disorders, cancer, etc).
- Include, as one of the priorities, the routine and sustainable collection of information on this matter.
- Disseminate the results of research and projects that scientifically demonstrate the relationship between diet, physical activity and chronic disease at related high-level meetings of political decision makers and in the media.
- Use the media to raise the profile of EU activities, projects and actions related to the promotion of physical activity and balanced diet and their impact on the prevention of certain chronic diseases.
- Develop awareness-raising campaigns aimed at health professionals and the general public.

***– Which are the most appropriate dissemination channels for the existing evidence?***

- The media.
- Creation of an Internet site.
- High-level meetings.
- Associations.
- Professional bodies.

## **V. AREAS FOR ACTION**

### **V. 1. Consumer information**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions:

***– When providing nutrition information to the consumer, what are the major nutrients, and categories of products, to be considered and why?***

***– Which kind of education is required in order to enable consumers to fully understand the information given on food labels, and who should provide it?***

- Training in nutritional health.
- Training in nutrition concepts and understanding of labelling.

Consumer associations, educational institutions.

***– Are voluntary codes (“self-regulation”) an adequate tool for limiting the advertising and marketing of energy-dense and micronutrient-poor foods? What would be the alternatives to be considered if self-regulation fails?***

***– How can effectiveness in self-regulation be defined, implemented and monitored?***

***– Which measures should be taken towards ensuring that the credulity and lacking media literacy of vulnerable consumers are not exploited by advertising, marketing and promotion activities?***

Legislative measures geared towards:

- Controls on content and time of broadcast of advertising of food products aimed at children so that they do not lead to the consumption of unhealthy foods.
- Controls on marketing strategies for food products intended for children and young people.

Additionally, activities in the educational environment could contribute to:

- Fostering a critical and reflective attitude towards the media, particularly television, and advertising strategies.

## **V.2. Consumer Education**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions:

***– How can consumers best be enabled to make informed choices and take effective action?***

- By providing clear, reliable and high-quality information on foods (ingredients, benefits and risks).
- By improving public awareness of the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity.
- By fostering a critical and reflective attitude towards the media and advertising strategies.

***– What contributions can public-private partnerships make toward consumer education?***

Consumer associations can make a contribution by:

- Educating the population in general and children in particular for responsible and healthy consumption, taking a light-hearted and participation-based approach.
- Creating alliances with local, regional and national governments to combine forces and develop joint activities (nutritional recommendations, information

materials, etc.).

- Developing information campaigns on responsible and healthy consumption, dissemination of information on the benefits of healthy lifestyles, information on nutritional health.

***– In the field of nutrition and physical activity, which should be the key messages to give to consumers, how and by whom should they be delivered?***

- Positive messages should be given on the benefits of the adoption of healthy lifestyles, to improve public information about nutrition and raise awareness of the impact on health of good eating habits, physical exercise and the early detection of obesity.
- Messages that prohibit and penalise should be avoided.
- Messages should come from public administrations at national, regional and local level, community bodies and public and private institutions with responsibilities in the area of education, public health, sports and agriculture, and the food industry. Messages should also come from health and education professionals.

### **V. 3. A focus on children and young people**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions in view of identifying best practices:

***– What are good examples for improving the nutritional value of school meals, and how can parents be informed on how to improve the nutritional value of home meals?***

***– What is good practice for the provision of physical activity in schools on a regular basis?***

***– What is good practice for fostering healthy dietary choices at schools, especially as regards the excessive intake of energy-dense snacks and sugar-sweetened soft drinks?***

***– How can the media, health services, civil society and relevant sectors of industry support health education efforts made by schools? What role can public-private partnerships play in this regard?***

The media, health services and sectors of industry can support health promotion activities in the school environment through coordination and shared commitment. Health promotion programmes could establish direct links between schools and health bodies and health centres in order to develop joint actions and activities. The media and sectors of industry could reinforce the efforts made in schools by participating in information and awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of a balanced diet and physical activity.

#### **V. 4. Food availability, physical activity and health education at the work place**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions in view of identifying best practices:

***– How can employers succeed in offering healthy choices at workplace canteens, and in improving the nutritional value of canteen meals?***

- By developing recipes and reasonably priced daily menus that are nutritionally complete, balanced and healthy while retaining their gastronomic qualities, and providing information on the calorie and nutrition content of the same.
- By producing and publishing tips and tricks for preparing healthy meals at home.
- By providing trays with a variety of fresh fruits to encourage staff to consume these rather than eating fatty and high calorie foods during the working day.
- By developing workshops on the incorporation of healthy and balanced eating in daily life.

***– What measures would encourage and facilitate the practice of physical activity during breaks, and on the way to and from work?***

- Creating parking facilities for bicycles, and providing incentives to cycle to work.
- Developing a short programme of physical activity for break times, compatible with working hours, and encouraging staff to follow it.
- Promoting the use of sports and exercise facilities in the vicinity by publishing their activity programmes.
- Creating exercise facilities in the workplace and/or changing rooms with showers to encourage travel on foot or using non-motorised transport.
- Developing workshops on the incorporation of regular physical activity into daily life.

#### **V.5. Building overweight and obesity prevention and treatment into health services**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions:

***– Which measures, and at what level, are needed to ensure a stronger integration aiming at promoting healthy diets and physical activity into***

### ***health services?***

- The implementation of information and support strategies to promote healthy lifestyles for the population in general and groups at risk (persons giving up smoking, persons taking medication that increases the appetite, pregnant, breast-feeding and menopausal women, immigrants, disadvantaged groups, etc.).
- Promotion of breast-feeding by primary healthcare centres.
- Systematic detection of risk of obesity, of unbalanced eating and sedentary habits.
- Development and implementation of "Minimum Advice" on diet and physical activity for use by health professionals.
- Promotion of training in diet and physical activity for health professionals.
- Developing incentives to support preventive health services and to promote measures enabling more time to be spent on health education in the primary healthcare sector and other services in a privileged position for health promotion intervention.

## **V.6. Addressing the obesogenic environment**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions:

***– In which ways can public policies contribute to ensure that physical activity be "built into" daily routines?***

***– Which measures are needed to foster the development of environments that are conducive to physical activity?***

Local authorities have an important role to play in the creation of environments conducive to physical activity. Autonomous, regional and local authorities responsible for public health and town planning should be encouraged to form partnerships and commit to the creation of conducive environments.

Town planning and social dynamisation options could include:

- Support to projects that promote urban networks and/or platforms for physical activity.
- Creation of parks, sporting facilities, pedestrian areas and skating tracks where the public can exercise in safety.
- Creation of physical activity and/or "keep fit" circuits: pathways within cities or in areas close by where the public can practice physical and sporting activity, with information on programmes for keeping fit (exercises, times, etc.).

## **V.7. Socio-economic inequalities**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions:

***- Which measures, and at what level, would promote healthy diets and physical activity towards population groups and households belonging to certain socioeconomic categories, and enable these groups to adopt healthier lifestyles?***

Local administrations and organisations could adopt measures geared towards developing habits for the adoption of healthy lifestyles through:

- health education in Primary Healthcare centres
- social dynamisation activities: workshops on incorporating physical activity into daily life taking a light-hearted and participation-based approach, leisure-time initiatives (fiestas, competitions, excursions, etc.)
- Sponsorship of sporting events.

***- How can the "clustering of unhealthy habits" that has frequently been demonstrated for certain socio-economic groups be addressed?***

#### **V.8. Fostering an integrated and comprehensive approach towards the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions:

***- Which are the most important elements of an integrated and comprehensive approach towards the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity?***

- The commitment and involvement of all of the institutions, foundations and associations, and sectors with a social responsibility to combat obesity.
- Intersectoral and multidisciplinary focus.
- Participation by civil society in the definition and design of strategies.
- Sustainability and short-, medium- and long-term approach.
- Monitoring, evaluation and regular review of action taken.

***- Which role at national and at Community level?***

An integrated and global approach should take the form of recommendations, voluntary agreements and self-regulation, so that the public can identify it with a positive approach, far removed from repressive, prescriptive or prohibiting campaigns. It should serve as a guideline and a framework for the development of more specific initiatives to be promoted and encouraged by public administrations and organisations.

#### **V.9. Recommendations for nutrient intakes and for the development of food-**



### **based dietary guidelines**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions:

***– In which way could social and cultural variations and different regional and national dietary habits be taken into account in food-based dietary guidelines at a European level?***

Taking account of existing cultural variations in dietary habits is key to the success of actions to promote a healthy diet. The healthy characteristics of the components or elements of each diet (i.e. benefits of the Mediterranean diet) could be highlighted and publicised, and diets based on healthy locally-grown and seasonal products from each region could be promoted.

***– How can the gaps between proposed nutrient targets and actual consumption patterns be overcome?***

***– How can dietary guidelines be communicated to consumers?***

Through:

- The media: agreements with those in charge.
- Health services and health professionals, particularly in Primary Healthcare, but also other professionals in a position to make dietary recommendations.
- Hotel and catering establishments and food services: collaboration agreements.
- Product labelling.
- Professional associations, parents associations, consumer associations.
- Participation by influential persons and personalities in information and awareness-raising campaigns.
- Entertainment programmes for children and young people.

***– In which way could nutrient profile scoring systems such as developed recently in UK contribute to such developments?***

### **V.10. Cooperation beyond the European Union**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions include:

***– Under which conditions should the Community engage in exchanging experience and identifying best practice between the EU and non-EU countries? If so, through which means?***

The European Community is an exceptional framework for the exchange of experiences

and best practice. It should promote this activity and encourage the Member States to become involved and make a commitment by:

- Providing spaces for discussion and exchange of best practices among the involved players and agents, such as the Platform.
- Collecting high-quality information on the key factors for a successful approach to the problem.
- Identifying and giving priority to the initiatives of greatest impact in the fight against unbalanced diets and sedentary habits.
- Disseminating information on the above (key factors for success and identification and giving priority to initiatives of greatest impact).
- Creating communication channels between the various Member States and third countries.
- Creation of a user-friendly and attractive Internet portal where social players can exchange experiences, accessible to the general public.
- Developing initiatives to spread best practices along the lines of the *Certamen de Experiencias* [a competition run by the Junta de Andalucía].

#### **V.11. Other issues**

Questions on which the Commission invites contributions include:

***– Are there issues not addressed in the present Green paper which need consideration when looking at the European dimension of the promotion of diet, physical activity and health?***

***– Which of the issues addressed in the present Green paper should receive first priority, and which may be considered less pressing?***

- Consumer education.
- Addressing the obesogenic environment.
- Specific actions for children and young people.
- Integration of the prevention and treatment of overweight and obesity in health services.
- Socio-economic inequalities.
- Global and integrated approach to the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity.



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