

Physical Activity Network for the West Midlands
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Response to EU Green Paper on Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases

Title of the paper:

We feel that definitions of what is meant by healthy eating and physical activity would be useful for those reading the green paper. We would suggest that the Council of Europe definition for Sport, incorporating physical activity be used

European Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health

The members of the Platform are given as, representatives of food, retail, catering and advertising industries, consumer organisations and health NGOs. This would suggest that there are no physical activity representatives within the membership of the platform, which appears from the list given to very nutrition led. We would advise that this should be addressed as a matter of priority to ensure that physical activity is represented on this group.

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?

Community Policies at all levels (international, national, regional and local) should make reference to encouraging a step change in the population to healthier lifestyles. These policies should incorporate a whole systems approach to increasing physical activity levels through a holistic package of commitments and actions from a supply perspective, including the environment (e.g. policy's on planning, buildings, housing, transport, landscapes), capacity (including resources and skills), access to facilities, access to green spaces, access to play, and commitments to increase the demand for activity friendly environments, increasing the populations knowledge on benefits of activity, effective campaigning and marketing, increased recognition of activity and sport in teaching curriculum's and advice to those at risk of chronic disease.

Active travel opportunities have a major part to play in increasing activity levels, in the UK cycling has a national average of 2% of the modal share, compared to other European Countries such as Denmark, Finland that have up to 15 – 15% of journeys made by cycle. More should be done at a European level to encourage its members to put into place policies, packages and resources to increase walking and cycling levels

A recent report completed in the West Midlands, England identifies how physical activity levels could be impacted upon and impact upon objectives and policies contained in a number of regional strategies. The report found a number of connections with key regional strategies including transport, housing, spatial planning, culture, health, economic and sustainable development. It is therefore recommended that Policy advisers across all sectors should be aware of the need to create increased activity levels and how this meets aims and objectives within other sectors. Sport England have developed a series of publications called “Sport playing it’s part” that identifies and provides case studies of how wide reaching targets can be met through activity and sport, including economic objectives, health objectives and sustainable communities objectives. This is downloadable from www.sportengland.org. Sport England has also published evidence on “Active Design” best practice and looking at how current planning guidance in the UK supports the development of activity friendly developments and environments. It is advocated that this approach be adopted by local planning organisations to maximise planning legislation to increase activity levels.

Community policies should include the monitoring of physical activity levels as a commitment, including active transport, and ensure that public sector bodies have a responsibility to monitor and increase physical activity through realistic targets.

The use of community policies to create safe environments in which to be active is highly important, this could be linked to fear of crime affecting the ability of children to play in the street, to poor street lighting meaning that people are less likely to walk.

Access to green and open spaces is also of key importance to enabling communities to have active lifestyles. The development of parks and green spaces and a communities proximity to the countryside can have huge effects on activity levels within communities and their ability to participate in active recreation opportunities.

It is also pertinent to recognise the importance of not only policy setting but that resources are allocated to see the commitments come to fruition, over appropriate lengths of time. Physical activity has suffered to a certain extent from a plethora of short term funded programmes. There is a real need to look at the

allocation of long term funding and resources for activity interventions and programmes to ensure that targets on activity levels are met across Europe.

The Choosing Health White Paper was published by the Department for Health, UK following wide scale public consultation regarding what was needed in the UK to support individuals to make healthier choices. The Choosing Health Physical Activity Action Plan details 101 cross government and organisation commitments to increase activity levels and make it easier for people to choose physical activity. These commitments cover research, green activity, education and skills, transport, culture, campaigning, environment and health. This is an example of a cross sector plan to increase activity levels and can be downloaded from www.dh.gov.uk. This cross sector approach should be advocated at all levels.

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

The Health benefits of physical activity have been well researched and documented, providing a great evidence base for why physical activity should be used as a health enhancing intervention for the prevention and treatment of a number of conditions. The Chief Medical Officer's "Five a Week" report published in 2004 by the Department for Health, UK clearly sets out his evidence. However less is known and agreed with regards to what interventions are the most successful in increasing activity levels in communities and populations.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), UK is due to publish its guidance on "An assessment of four commonly used methods to increase physical activity: brief interventions in primary care, pedometers, exercise referral schemes and community based exercise programme" in March 2006 and highlights a number of areas where further high level research is needed regarding Physical Activity interventions. Copies of this guidance have not yet been published but will be available for download from www.publichealth.nice.org.uk.

We would recommend that a standard method and measure of demonstrating the cost effectiveness of physical activity interventions be designed for use at a local, regional, national and European level.

Other areas identified by the Network for further research include;

- Population approached to increasing cycling and walking levels
- Incentive schemes – most effective, cost effective etc.
- The cost effectiveness of physical activity interventions i.e.; is one particular intervention better value for money than another?
- Cost effectiveness of physical activity compared to other health treatments i.e. medication etc.

- Consensus on how to monitor physical activity in young people at a population level, current surveys focus on adults (IPAQ, Active People etc) with no validated international measure for children's activity levels available.
- Physical Activity through Play activities
- Effective family based interventions to get active

Section IV.4.3

PAN-WM welcomes the Health and Consumer Protection programme focus on promotion and prevention but suggests that the programme may need to look wider than the threat of disease to encourage the cultural shift in healthy eating and physical activity levels. Evidence suggests that the threat of disease may not be enough to encourage communities and populations to change their behaviour.

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

PAN-WM would welcome a consistent and simple measurement of obesity employing a consistent methodology. This would standardise the way in which we monitor obesity, currently both BMI and waist measurement are recognised and employed depending on the preference of the organization.

V.1.2 Customer information, advertising and marketing

This section focuses on the marketing employed with regards to high density foods however PAN-WM would advocate the investigation of the effects of the advertising employed by companies marketing "sedentary behaviour" products e.g. computers, internet, play stations etc.

V.3.1 A focus on Children and Young People

The evidence regarding healthy diet and improved concentration is explicitly mentioned in the paragraph, however no mention is made of the evidence base for physical activity's ability to aid cognitive function, concentration and improve behaviour. PAN-WM would like to see this evidence alluded to aid the embedding of physical activity within whole school approaches to health and obesity.

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?

The key message for physical activity should be related to an ethos of "do more, more often" and have a generic focus that does not always medicalise activity i.e.

“30 minutes, five times a week benefits health”. In particular only linking physical activity to the obesity agenda may lessen the impact of the campaign as a large amount of the population may switch off from the messages, as they do not consider themselves as overweight or obese. Also to effect weight, research shows that an individual would need to participate in 60 – 90 minutes of activity a day which is an off putting message and considered unsustainable for most people.

This has been evidenced by campaigns that have been run in the UK, that found that different target groups are interested in different benefits from activity i.e. having fun, socialising and meeting friends, gaining recognition, learning skills, better health, feeling of belonging, increased confidence etc. There is a need for any campaign to be targeted, presenting activity as a method of meeting what is most important to those target groups.

Humorous campaigns such as the ones employed in Scotland, regarding physical activity tapping into the film “Trainspotting’s” famous monologue speech of “Get a Life” are particularly memorable, funny and harnessed key target groups such as families, overweight people etc in a humorous way. This approach should be recommended.

The use of role models is a useful approach; both celebrities and local people who have had success in particular activities can act as champions for being active. Harnessing events such as World Cups, the Commonwealth Games and the Olympic Games to promote activity and healthy lifestyles would also be an advocated approach.

These messages should be delivered by a wide range of people not just health professionals, including teachers, leisure and sports people, employers, community representatives, public sector bodies etc. The effective harnessing of multi media opportunities to promote physical activity through storylines in programmes, articles and campaigns in magazines should be fully utilised so that active lifestyles are seen as the “norm”.

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

There is a real need to understand the current activity levels of children and young people at a population and community level, through the utilisation of a validated survey, and or other measurement methods. A European accredited system would enable bench marking across Country’s to look at effectiveness of policy and interventions in driving up activity levels. This may increase knowledge on advocated approaches to driving up physical activity levels in young people. Evidence of interventions to effectively target children’s activity levels is needed although it recognized that a number of quality programmes are

running in a number of areas including sports programmes, dance programmes and cycling training programmes

In the UK the following programmes are being used to increase physical activity opportunities for children;

PE, School Sport and Club Links Programme

The PE, School Sport and Club Links Strategy has been jointly developed by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to maximise the opportunities for young people to access high quality sport and P.E in schools. The Strategy directly links to the DfES and DCMS PSA target for all children to receive 2 hours of high quality PE and school sport a week. The programme incorporates seven strands;

- A network of Sports Colleges and school sports partnerships
- Step in to Sport volunteering programme
- Gifted and Talented programme
- School swimming programme
- School club links programme to facilitate more young people moving from school based sport to sports clubs
- Professional development for teachers
- QCA PE and sport investigation.

Further information is available from www.youthsporttrust.gov.uk and www.teachernet.gov.uk

Healthy Schools

The Healthy Schools Programme encourages schools to take a whole school approach to promoting the health and well being of everyone involved in the school to help raise attainment levels and promote social inclusion within the community. The programme is managed at a local level by a partnership between the Local Education Authority and the Primary Care Trust and focuses on improving the diet of school children, increasing levels of physical activity, and developing children through PSHE activities. A target has been set for every school to have Healthy School Status by 2009.

Further information is available from www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk .

School Travel Plans

A joint target has been set by the Department for Transport and the Department for Education and Skills for all schools to have a School Travel plan by 2010. The aim of the plans is to encourage schools to identify problems relating to the school journey, particularly the health and safety aspects of traveling and propose ways to improve the journey to school for pupils, parents, teachers and the local community. School Travel plans can aid the meeting of local modal shift targets away from car travel by decreasing the number of car journeys to the

school and implementing programmes such as walking buses, cycling lessons etc to increase those utilising active travel opportunities.

Further information is available from www.teachnet.gov.uk and www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk.

Good Practice evidence is available throughout these programmes and can be gained from these activities.

These programmes are commitments included within the Choosing Health; Physical Activity Action Plan relating to schools, however currently programmes are focused more on active recreation and sport within schools and we feel that wider physical activity (gardening, dance, cycling, games and play) opportunities should be encouraged with in schools, through the curriculum, and extra curricular activities, including the design and layout of schools, play grounds and the routes to schools. Potential also exists for curriculum changes to maximise physical activity opportunities through the school day and increase a child's understanding of the importance of being physical activity, and self efficacy with regards to being active.

Work force development, of teachers and staff working with young people will be needed to ensure that teachers are supported to embed the principles of an active lifestyle within school policy and ensure that activity opportunities that are utilised within the school setting are appropriate.

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

It is imperative that the forging of links with the business sectors is undertaken at all levels through licencing authorities, chambers of commerce and development agencies at local, national and European levels to encourage the business sector to embrace the ethos of healthy workforces.

Making the business case for encouraging employees to be physically active needs to happen, using conclusive evidence of the benefits that an employer would receive from introducing activity opportunities as part of the employment package. Details such as money saved etc per employee, sick days saved etc will all be pertinent in encouraging employers to have an active work force.

In the UK the tax-free cycle scheme, provides tax breaks for both the employer and employee when the employers purchases a cycle and safety equipment for the employee to lease. This provides a monetary incentive for both parties to use the cycle for active transport and would fit within the Employer travel plans that UK businesses are encouraged to have. It is now a criteria for planning

permission that for new business developments over a certain size employer travel plans must be in place, see the overleaf passage from the Planning and Policy Guidance 13, National Planning guidance for Travel Plans.

89. The Government considers that travel plans should be submitted alongside planning applications which are likely to have significant transport implications, including those for:

1. all major developments comprising jobs, shopping, leisure and services (using the same thresholds as set out in annex D);
2. smaller developments comprising jobs, shopping, leisure and services which would generate significant amounts of travel in, or near to, air quality management areas, and in other locations where there are local initiatives or targets set out in the development plan or local transport plan for the reduction of road traffic, or the promotion of public transport, walking and cycling. This particularly applies to offices, industry, health and education uses;
3. new and expanded school facilities which should be accompanied by a school travel plan which promotes safe cycle and walking routes, restricts parking and car access at and around schools, and includes on-site changing and cycle storage facilities; and
4. where a travel plan would help address a particular local traffic problem associated with a planning application, which might otherwise have to be refused on local traffic grounds.

It is suggested that other areas for investigation regarding employers, employees and physical activity are;

- Further tax breaks for employers that successfully promote and enable their work force to be active for example;
 - No VAT charges made on corporate gym membership and sports club memberships for the employer
- Decreased insurance premiums for health and safety issues due to healthier, more alert employees.
- Lower cost business rates for employers with employer travel plans that increase the modal share of walking and cycling, leading to less congestion etc.

- Lower tax brackets or social security/National Insurance contributions or other monetary incentives for employees who can prove active travel options are being used.

It should be noted that we are not suggesting these are advocated approaches but that these are possible ideas for investigation.

It is also suggested that legislation or directives on leaving work stations or work areas for regular periods during the day would ensure that the health of employees is promoted within the workplace. These breaks could encourage employees to be active during their workday.

Which measures, and at what level, are needed to ensure that a stronger integration aiming at promoting healthy diets and physical activity into health services?

PAN-WM advocates that a measurable physical activity target be embedded within Health service monitoring frameworks. It is felt that until this happens physical activity will continue to be a poor relation to other public health interventions that are monitored through these frameworks. If the health services were being monitored through outcomes frameworks on physical activity levels in the population there is likely to be increased investment in physical activity to ensure these targets are met.

There is a need for all frontline health care staff to understand physical activity messages and promote active lifestyles to patients. It is recommended that training on active lifestyles be included within Continuing Professional Development packages offered to staff. It is important that physical activity is not just seen as the domain of public health and health promotion colleagues but that all health professionals have a role to play in encouraging patients to be more active.

The inclusion of physical activity advice or referral to activity programmes under the payment system for GP practices would help to ensure the equality of access to activity programmes across country's. This would also help to ensure that giving physical activity advice was the norm for Practice/Surgery based staff. This could be linked to the use of Patient activity questionnaires, that would not only identify those needing support to get more active but also enable data to be collected to establish activity levels across an area.

With regards to the resources allocated for public health and prevention of diseases we would suggest that a % of resources should be allocated and committed to targeting obesity and its associated diseases through healthy eating and physical activity interventions. This would aid the sustainability of

programmes and ensure that long term commitments were made to tackling obesity rather than resorting to short term funded project based interventions.

In which ways can public policies contribute to ensure that physical activity be “built into” daily routines?

Please see the answer given for “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?”

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

PAN-WM suggest that there is a need to provide international best practice examples of “activity – genic” environments to champion approaches to developing activity friendly environments. The Sport England Active Design work programme identifies a number of best practice examples from England that show how activity friendly environments can be developed using current planning guidance. This can be downloaded from www.sportengland.org.

PAN-WM suggest that the forthcoming NICE guidance regarding physical activity and the environment that will be published in 2007 should be fed into the EU work programme on obesity, healthy eating and physical activity.

The physical activity proofing of planning and transport strategies would ensure that the need for physical activity conducive environments is embedded within regional, national and European planning guidance and strategic objectives regarding the design and development of towns and cities.

It should be recognised that comprehensive long term support at strategic and delivery levels will be needed to develop behaviour change and see a cultural shift in healthier lifestyles. This support may include the need for legislation, strategy and policy, research and resources to ensure that the commitment to healthier lifestyles comes to fruition.

Other issues

PAN-WM would advocate that a consistent message connecting the role of food and physical activity in tackling obesity be developed Europe wide, to aid the development of joined up approaches to tackle rising obesity levels.

There is currently no statutory provision of physical activity and sport or strategy requirement for workplaces or schools relating to physical activity, food or health, we are unsure if this is the case across the whole of Europe but would advocate the development of proposals for a statutory requirement for physical activity provision for the public sector.

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