



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Programme of Action for Children

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Response to Green Paper 15th March 2006

“Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases”

http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/documents/nutrition_gp_en.pdf

Commission of the European Communities

Introduction

While the paper is welcome in principle, it focuses on proximal causes of overweight and obesity and is structured along the lines of topics.

In line with the recently published WHO European Statutory for Child & Adolescent Health and Development,¹ it is proposed to revise the paper, taking account of the four principles endorsed by WHO:

- Life course approach
- Equity
- Intersectoral action

¹ <http://www.euro.who.int/childhealthdev>

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➤ Participation

Common Agricultural Policy

The European Commission's support in reforming common agricultural policy across Europe to promote the production of healthy foods at affordable prices without contributing to economic disadvantage and poverty in less developed countries is essential.

Intersectoral Collaboration to create Healthier Environments

Research on the development of models for intersectoral action to create health environments and communities is required.

Children and Young People

Good evidence exists that single issue programmes within schools are not effective for the prevention or management of childhood overweight and obesity. Programmes need to be multifaceted and based on the health promoting schools model.²

There is emerging evidence that the main risk factors for obesity and overweight in later life lie in infancy and very early childhood.³ The green paper fails to take account of this and should include recommendations to address overweight and obesity amongst adolescents, who are the parents of the next generation, and parental obesity, antenatal care, infant nutrition, weaning practices and active play.

Training of health service providers in principles of good practice on the prevention and management of child overweight and obesity is required. To this end, the Programme of Action for Children (PAC) has developed national guidelines for community based practitioners in the prevention and management of childhood overweight and obesity⁴ to complement the recently published National Task Force on Obesity Report.⁵

² Campbell K, Waters E, O'Meara S, Kelly S, Summerbell C. Interventions for preventing obesity in children. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2002, Issue 2. Art. No.: CD001871. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD001871.

³ Reilly JJ, Armstrong J, Dorosty AR, Emmett PM, Ness A, Rogers I, Steer C, Sherriff A (for the ALSPAC study team). Early life risk factors for obesity in childhood: cohort study. *BMJ*, doi:10.1136/bmj.38470.670903.E0 (published 20 May 2005).

⁴ <http://www.pacirl.ie>

⁵ National Task Force on Obesity. Obesity- the policy challenges. Department of Health and Children; Dublin: 2005.

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Addressing the Obesogenic Environment

While policies might exist at national and international level to promote physical activity through transport and planning, financial resources to implement such policies are required. If governments do not make such funding available, policies are of limited impact.

Socio Economic Inequalities

The paper asks questions as to how to target measures at disadvantaged groups, rather than proposing to address the root causes of health and social inequalities, namely poverty and educational disadvantage.

Mental Health

As outlined at the beginning of this response, the paper fails to take account of the importance of promoting positive health to enable people to opt for healthier as the easier choices. Support of families and communities to raise resilient and healthy children through realisation of their full developmental potential is not only relevant to physical but also psychological and mental health, as recognised in the previously referred to WHO European Strategy for Child & Adolescent Health & Development.

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