



First Steps Nutrition Trust - 2023 HSCSC Inquiry: Prevention in health and social care

Overview

First Steps Nutrition Trust is an independent public health nutrition charity focused on the early years. We provide conflict-of-interest free resources to health care professionals to support them in their work with expectant mothers and families with babies and children under five years old, and seek to influence Government policies to create an environment which is more enabling for them to eat well.

The lack of necessary attention to the specific nutritional needs and vulnerabilities of infants, young children and their mothers is leading to preventable ill health. A key indicator is persistently high rates of childhood obesity, which will only be brought down if preventive efforts include sufficient action in the first 1,000 days, from pregnancy to age 2.

We urge the committee to include in the inquiry a focus on the adequacy and coherence of Government interventions intended to meet the target of halving childhood obesity by 2030.

Case for Action

The target for obesity reduction is only seven years away, but latest data shows that rates of overweight and obesity remain unacceptably high at 22.3%, unchanged since at least 2006/7.¹ Added to this, inequalities are rising; obesity rates are twice high for children from deprived areas compared to those in the most affluent areas². Inequalities are being exacerbated by the cost of living crisis, which is negatively affecting diet quality^{3,4}, making necessary action even more urgent.

The Government needs to follow through on its commitment to reducing childhood obesity to benefit children, but also because obesity tracks through the life course, and there are intergenerational effects⁵; early years food and nutrition is neglected and yet it sets the trajectory for life. Once established obesity is hard and costly to reverse, and is associated with many comorbidities, including type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, musculoskeletal conditions, liver and kidney disease, and poor mental health⁶. Obesity can shorten life expectancy by up to 10

¹ [National Child Measurement Programme, England, 2021/22 school year - NDRS \(digital.nhs.uk\)](#)

² Ibid

³ [The Broken Plate 2022 | Food Foundation](#)

⁴ [Good Food Programme - How can innovation v2 \(urbanhealth.org.uk\)](#)

⁵ [Childhood obesity as a predictor of morbidity in adulthood: a systematic review and meta-analysis - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

⁶ [Turning-the-Tide-A-10-year-Healthy-Weight-Strategy.pdf \(obesityhealthalliance.org.uk\)](#)

years.⁷ The economic impacts are huge; the NHS spends £6.5 billion annually on treating obesity-related ill health and an estimate of the total economic impact of obesity was £58 billion in 2022, including NHS and care costs as well as lost productivity/workforce inactivity and arising benefits⁸. In 2021 we published a report titled: *“Enabling Children to be a healthy weight: What we need to do better in the first 1000 days”*, making 18 recommendations we believe would ensure action towards meeting the 2030 obesity reduction goal⁹. Two years on we have seen partial action on only two of these recommendations. At the same time evidence on the many drivers of childhood obesity and barriers to addressing it continues to accrue (e.g. ^{10, 11, 12, 13}) and others have published similar, evidence-based reports^{14, 15}.

We believe this area warrants particularly scrutiny because of the Government’s inaction on promised policy interventions, with no/inadequate justification. These include delays in key measures to address obesity such as High Fat Salt Sugar advertising restrictions, publication of baby food composition guidelines, and consultation on the marketing and labelling of baby foods.

First Steps Nutrition Trust Inquiry Asks

We call on the Committee to investigate the coherence and adequacy of Government actions to meet the Government target of halving childhood obesity by 2030. Persistently high rates of obesity place an avoidable burden on the NHS and have negative economic impacts. First Steps Nutrition Trust intends to submit evidence in support of our recommended policy solutions focused on the first 1000 days, which we believe are necessary to reduce the prevalence of obesity.

For more information, please contact: vicky@firststepsnutrition.org

⁷ [Body-mass index and cause-specific mortality in 900 000 adults: collaborative analyses of 57 prospective studies - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

⁸ [PowerPoint Presentation \(frontier-economics.com\)](#)

⁹ [Obesity+report+May2021+for+web.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

¹⁰ [Baby & Toddler Sweet Snacks - Action on Sugar](#)

¹¹ [Baby & Toddler Breakfasts - Action on Sugar](#)

¹² [State-of-Health-Visiting-Report-2022-FINAL-VERSION-13.01.23.pdf \(ihv.org.uk\)](#)

¹³ [How the marketing of formula milk influences our decisions on infant feeding \(who.int\)](#)

¹⁴ [Turning-the-Tide-A-10-year-Healthy-Weight-Strategy.pdf \(obesityhealthalliance.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁵ [Preconception, Pregnancy and Healthy Weight in Childhood | Food Foundation \(89up.org\)](#)