



The National Assembly for Wales' Children and Young People Committee Inquiry into Childhood Obesity

Response from British Heart Foundation (BHF) Cymru
May 2013

British Heart Foundation (BHF) Cymru is Wales' leading heart charity. We are working to achieve our mission of a world in which no-one dies prematurely of heart disease. We fund ground breaking medical research, provide support and care to people living with heart disease and advocate for change. We rely on donations from the public to fund our life saving work.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this broad reaching consultation on childhood obesity. Over one in three children in Wales are today classed as overweight or obese.¹ Obese children are more likely to become obese adults, and this in turn is linked to an increased risk of serious health problems, including heart disease.

Our response is divided into two sections. The first relates to physical activity and healthy eating as a means of preventing obesity. The second provides information from evaluations of a BHF Hearty Lives project, promoting healthy eating and physical activity in early years settings.

Physical activity and healthy eating in preventing obesity

Evidence shows that children who are physically active have a better chance of becoming healthy adults. Despite this, many children are not reaching the target of 60 minutes of physical activity each day. The Welsh Health Survey 2011 found that just over 50 per cent of children are doing one hour of physical activity at least five days a week.²

Schools need to maximise the opportunities to be active in and around the school day. Children should be encouraged to participate in extracurricular physical activities, to be physically active at break-times and to walk and cycle to school. Providing a wide range of activities in a positive and inclusive environment can help more children to get involved.

Some groups of young people are less active than others, for example adolescent girls are often less active than boys of the same age.³ To tackle these inequalities all children and young people should be encouraged to be active through a range of easily accessible activities as well as opportunities for unstructured activity.

Collection of information on physical activity levels is inconsistent across the four UK nations, making direct comparisons and tracking of trends over time difficult. This should be addressed through consistent collection of data by local authorities, regional bodies, national governments and agencies. Data should cover the full range of physical activities and use

¹ Welsh Health Survey 2011 <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2012/120919sdr1542012en.pdf>

² As above

³ As above

agreed banding of age groups to enable comparisons. Targets and indicators for monitoring physical activity, and inactivity, in children and young people should also be comparable.

Enjoying a balanced diet at a young age can help build healthy habits that last into adulthood. Dietary surveys show that, overall, we are eating too much saturated fat and salt, and not enough fruit and vegetables. However, parents' efforts to encourage their children to eat healthily are being undermined by advertisements for foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS). HFSS foods are not allowed to be advertised during children's television programmes. But many of the programmes children enjoy most are not classed specifically as children's entertainment, and advertisers can choose these slots to promote HFSS foods. Showing television advertisements for HFSS foods and drinks after the 9pm watershed would better protect children.

In addition, a regulatory loophole allows companies to advertise unhealthy foods and drinks to children online. We understand that protecting children from unhealthy food and drink marketing is not a magic bullet solution to the problem of childhood obesity - but it is an important part of the solution.

Introducing equally stringent measures across the broadcast and non-broadcast marketing codes, extending the regulations to cover all marketing techniques, and distinguishing between healthy and HFSS foods would better protect children.⁴ We urge the National Assembly for Wales to call on the UK Government to take action on this issue.

Hearty Lives

People living in the poorest neighbourhoods will, on average, die several years earlier than people living in the richest neighbourhoods. Heart disease is a major cause of these premature death rates. The British Heart Foundation's £11 million Hearty Lives programme aims to reduce these inequalities in heart disease through local partnership working and tailored projects for those who need them most. In Wales projects are running in Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent and Port Talbot. In 2013 all our Hearty Lives projects are focussing on children.

An evaluation of the Bristol Hearty Lives project with early years practitioners has recently been published. Although based outside of Wales, the findings are relevant to areas right across the UK and we believe are of interest to this inquiry. The early years workforce is well placed not only to encourage children to be active and eat well, but also to help their families understand the significance of these early opportunities too.

The workshops had a positive impact on practitioners' ability and confidence to facilitate physical activity and healthy eating with children in their settings. Especially in encouraging and enabling them to share their knowledge and skills more widely, including with children's parents and carers.

Get Up and Go! : In October 2010 and 2011 early years practitioners attended workshops aimed at promoting physical activity with young children. Recommendations have been made which reflect the feelings and ideas of the practitioners and managers who were interviewed:⁵

⁴ The British Heart Foundation and Children's Food Campaign (2011) *The 21st Century Gingerbread House: How companies are marketing junk food to children online*.

⁵ Please see attached documents for full evaluation

- Continued professional development (CPD) opportunities for early years practitioners promoting physical activity need to highlight the importance of physical development as a prime area and the significance of physical activity within this.
- Children should be involved in regular conversations about the health benefits of being physically active.
- Individuals acting as 'Healthy Champions' can pass on training within local networks
- Practitioners would particularly welcome CPD opportunities that raise understanding and confidence in promoting physical activity with children especially in relation to pre-walking children, disabled children, girls, reducing barriers to physical activity, and supporting parental understanding.
- All early years setting should have a copy of the CMO guidelines available to all staff, and the guidelines should be an agenda item at team meetings to promote their content.

The evaluation suggests that awareness of the Chief Medical Officer *Start Active Stay Active* guidelines is low within the early years sector in Bristol. It is essential for the guidelines to become embedded in practice, and shared with parents, in order to influence the amount and kinds of physical activity that children are encouraged to do.

Food for Thought: hands-on cookery workshops for child-minders and children aiming to promote an awareness of healthy eating. Recommendations from the workshops include:⁶

- Child-minders can encourage children to try, and enjoy eating more vegetables by increasing the quantity and types of vegetables offered. Given that children are more likely to eat fruit than veg at home, child-minders should consider the balance between fruit and vegetables offered at snack times and to increase the variety and frequency of fresh vegetables provided.
- Regular involvement in food preparation increases the likelihood of children enjoying and trying a wide range of foods.
- Child-minders should consider how food related experiences can be developed to reflect children's interest and lives
- Developing healthy eating policies with parents can help provide support for parents as well as keeping healthy eating at the forefront of practice.
- Child-minders say the workshops have benefitted the children in their care in a variety of ways. On-going CPD relating to healthy food provision would be welcome and a charge for this would be acceptable. Sessions would need to be run out of normal working hours.

An evaluation of Hearty Lives Torfaen is in production and will be published in the summer. Please contact tannere@bhf.org.uk if you would like to receive a copy.

For any queries regarding this response please contact Delyth Lloyd, Press and Public Affairs Manager, BHF Cymru. Lloyd@bhf.org.uk 02920 382406

⁶ Please see attached documents for full evaluation