

# HOLYROOD 2026 MANIFESTO

## SCOTLAND'S GOOD FOOD FUTURE

Making healthy eating the **NORM**

Scotland has become a place where unhealthy food and drink choices are the easiest, cheapest and most heavily promoted options. This is not individual failure, but the result of a system that makes poor diets the default - damaging health and deepening inequalities.

Scotland is way off course in reducing obesity and overweight. These conditions are placing growing strain on the NHS and other public services, particularly in communities bearing the brunt of poverty and inequality<sup>1</sup>. Continuing to address these issues after harm has occurred is unsustainable. Costly new drugs are also not the silver bullet.

The Scottish Parliament election presents an opportunity for transformational change. Incremental action won't be enough. Bold, population-level policies are needed to make healthy choices the easy, affordable norm - improving quality of life, reducing inequalities and strengthening the public purse.

## OUR THREE MUST HAVES FOR THE NEXT SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT:

### 1. HEALTHY CHILDREN

- » Provide nutritious free school meals for all children
- » Protect children from junk food marketing

### 2. HEALTHY PLACES

- » Restrict price promotions on junk food
- » Make junk food retailers accountable
- » Reduce the number of fast food outlets in our communities

### 3. HEALTHY PEOPLE

- » Make healthy food affordable and local
- » Address weight stigma in the NHS and in the wider community
- » Provide treatment for those already living with obesity



# THE PROBLEM

Scotland's health progress has stalled over the past decade, particularly for our most disadvantaged communities. Rates of overweight and obesity in Scotland remain unacceptably high and continue to pose a significant challenge, limiting scope to improve population health and reduce health inequalities. Obesity shortens life and increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, is a known cause of 13 types of cancer and is linked to cardiovascular disease, dementia and many other non-communicable diseases. That's why Obesity Action Scotland and the Scottish Obesity Alliance are calling for urgent, prevention-focused action to achieve healthy weight for all in Scotland.



Reducing obesity would improve lives by preventing disease and supporting better health. It would also boost economic benefits. A 5% annual reduction in obesity could generate significant savings in health and social care costs and boost productivity across Scotland<sup>2</sup>.

## IMPACT ON LIVES

### Children

» **1/3 of children** in Scotland are living with overweight or obesity

### Adults

» **2/3 of adults** in Scotland are living with overweight or obesity<sup>3</sup>

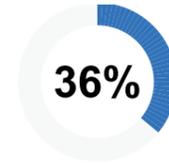
## THE ECONOMIC COST

» **£776 million** per year cost of obesity to NHS in Scotland<sup>4</sup>

» **£210 million** per year cost of obesity to employers through reduced employment rates, lower productivity and increased sickness absence<sup>2</sup>

» **£50 billion** estimated cumulative cost of obesity in Scotland by the end of next parliament (2022-2030)<sup>4</sup>

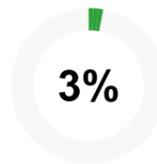
## THE SCALE OF INJUSTICE



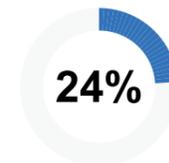
Children in Scotland's poorest areas are more than twice as likely to live with obesity as those in the most affluent<sup>5</sup>. For adults, the gap is stark too – 36% live with obesity in deprived areas compared to 19% in the wealthiest<sup>6</sup>.



For families in Scotland's poorest areas, eating a healthy diet could cost almost half of their disposable income, rising to 70% for households with children<sup>7</sup>.



Food insecurity: in 2024, 16% of adults in the most deprived areas reported being worried about running out of food, compared with 3% in the least deprived areas<sup>8</sup>.



Takeaways account for a larger share of all food outlets in the most deprived communities (24%) than in the least deprived (16%)<sup>9</sup>.



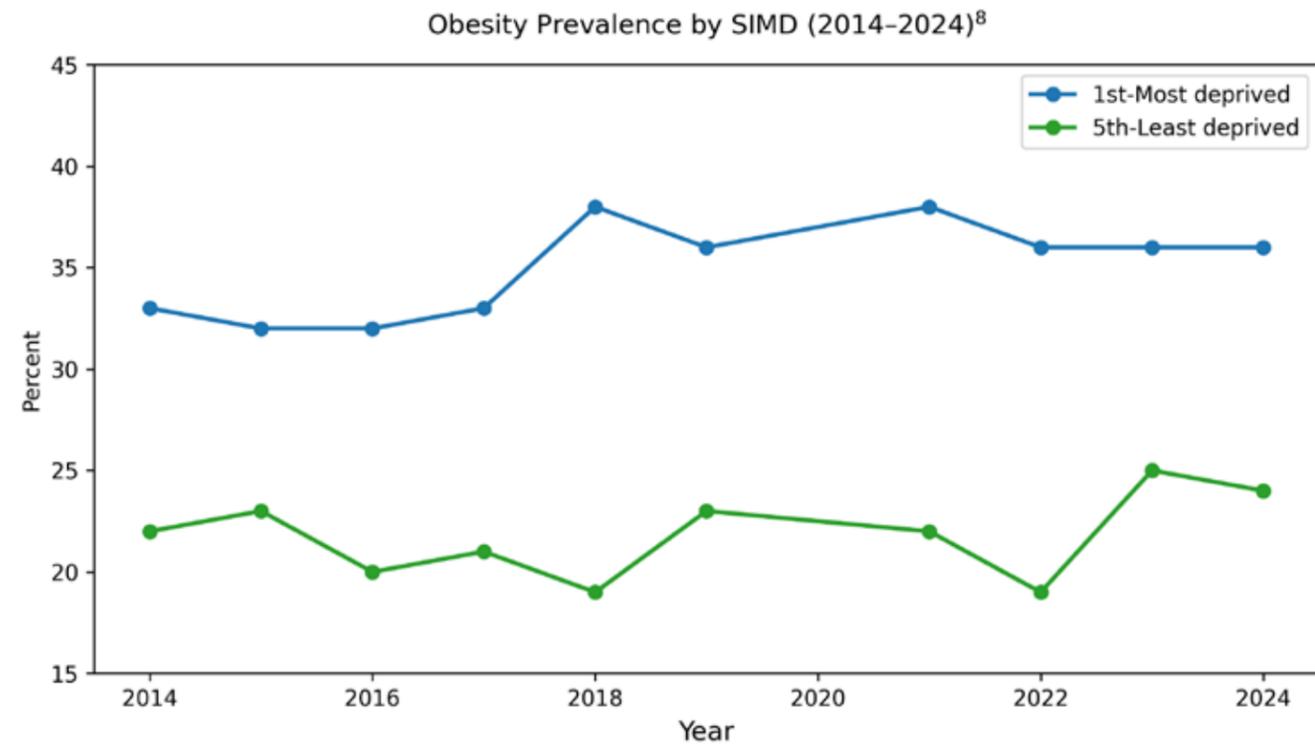
## Cost of Healthy food

healthy foods are twice as expensive per calorie than less healthy foods<sup>7</sup>



## THE 2030 COMMITMENT IS OUT OF REACH

Scotland is not on track to meet the Scottish Government's goal of halving child obesity by 2030. If no additional action is taken, projections show that by 2040 there could be 3.3 million adults living with overweight or obesity, with particularly sharp increases in obesity levels<sup>10</sup>. The trend is moving in the wrong direction.



## ACHIEVING HEALTHY WEIGHT

**We want the next generation of Scots to be the healthiest ever.** If we're going to improve Scotland's national diet and health, we need system-wide change. That means population-level, government-led interventions are essential, as evidence indicates that individual focused approaches alone are insufficient to reduce national obesity prevalence. Political commitment, government actions at all levels, with regulatory interventions, retailer accountability and environmental changes are all essential.

Obesity is driven by a complex interplay of individual and structural factors, from diet, physiology, psychology and physical activity to social, economic, commercial and environmental influences. Treatment alone cannot solve this growing crisis - medication can help, but it does not prevent obesity or stop it recurring. Fundamentally, Scotland continues to miss dietary targets because junk foods are cheap, widely available and heavily promoted, while healthier options remain comparatively more expensive.

# OUR THREE MUST HAVES FOR THE NEXT SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Scotland should become a Good Food Nation that works for everyone. The next Scottish Parliament and Government must act urgently to improve Scotland's food environment and reduce obesity, particularly for children and communities where healthy choices are harder to afford. This will require national leadership, and action by local authorities and the UK Government. The Scottish Government must deliver commitments that go beyond the Population Health Framework<sup>11</sup>. Policy makers must use the powers, evidence and tools available to make the healthiest choices the easiest choices<sup>12</sup>.



### HEALTHY CHILDREN

#### Protecting children from junk food marketing

The next Scottish Parliament should pass legislation to ban outdoor advertising of junk foods and drinks, including billboards, public transport and sponsorship of professional sports and events in Scotland. The Scottish Government should work with the UK Government to implement comprehensive restrictions on TV, online and digital advertising. Further joint action is essential to shield children and families from aggressive marketing.



#### Nutritious free school meals for all

It's clear that we are not getting it right for every child, with healthy food still unaffordable or inaccessible for many families. The next Scottish Government should provide free, nutritious school meals to all children across primary and secondary schools. This will reduce diet-related inequalities, particularly for children in low-income families, prevent obesity early and embed a culture where healthy eating is the norm.



## 2 HEALTHY PLACES

### Restricting promotions of unhealthy food

Price and location promotions of junk food and drinks drive unhealthy purchasing, particularly among families on tight budgets. The next Scottish Government should pass bolder and broader regulations that progressively restrict all forms of price and location promotions on junk food and drinks in retail, public spaces and out of home settings. This should include meals and temporary price reductions, while promoting healthier options.

### Controlling fast food outlet density

Scotland's most deprived communities have the highest concentrations of fast-food outlets and takeaways<sup>9</sup>, while healthy food options remain scarcer and more expensive. Local authorities can use the National Planning Framework (NPF4)<sup>13</sup> and Local Development Plans (LDPs) to limit the density of unhealthy food outlets, especially in areas used by children and young people. The next Scottish Government should provide clear guidance and support to help them create healthier local food environments. It should consider international and UK learning including from England on the implementation of Takeaway Management Zones<sup>14</sup>.

### Holding retailers to account

The UK Government's plan for mandatory reporting on the healthiness of food sales presents a major opportunity for reform. Major retailers, which dominate the grocery market and shape diets, must be held accountable for the food environment they create, given the commercial reliance on HFSS sales across the food system. Scotland should take a distinctive approach by introducing mandatory reporting for retail food businesses, alongside healthy food sales targets. Furthermore, nutrition advisory boards informing policy must be independent and free from commercial conflicts of interest.



## 3 HEALTHY PEOPLE

### Making healthy food affordable and local

The next Scottish Government should equip local authorities and health boards with the funding, guidance and expertise needed to deliver effective Local Good Food Nation Plans<sup>15</sup>. Strong local leadership is essential to implement and achieve the Scottish Dietary Goals, ensure access to healthy, nutritious food locally and realise the Act's key outcome: a food system that promotes physical and mental health and reduces diet-related conditions, particularly in deprived communities.

### Addressing weight stigma

People living with obesity face stigma and discrimination that harm mental and physical health and make weight management harder. Efforts to tackle obesity must avoid blame, provide compassionate healthcare, use inclusive language and protect against discrimination. Initiatives should actively involve communities in their design and delivery, while the Scottish Parliament and Government must advocate for inclusive approaches.

### Providing treatment for those who need it

While prevention is a key priority, we must also ensure that effective, equitable and compassionate treatment services are available for those living with obesity. The next Scottish Government should design and enhance NHS capability for community-based and specialist Diet and Weight Programmes and Services and review further evidence on weight-loss medications as part of the overall approach to obesity treatment in Scotland.





# MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

Tackling obesity requires coordinated action across **government, public services, local authorities, businesses and communities**. However, its success will depend fundamentally on the next Scottish Government's efforts to tackle structural poverty, the damage caused by austerity and the unaffordability of healthy food. Scotland's next Diet and Healthy Weight Delivery Plan should be a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound), evidence-driven plan that guides a whole-system approach, with strong community engagement and cross-sector collaboration. A Good Food Nation must place health at its core. Ongoing evaluation will be essential to track progress, identify barriers and solve problems, ensuring Scotland's food environment supports healthier, more accessible choices for all.



It's time **for**  
**Change**

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## ABOUT US



**Obesity Action Scotland** provides clinical leadership and independent advocacy to prevent and reduce obesity, raising awareness, evaluating evidence and collaborating with experts and organisations to promote healthy weight and wellbeing.



**Scottish Obesity Alliance** is a forum for organisations to collaborate to influence policy and practice on obesity prevention in Scotland. It is composed of leading national health charities, medical royal colleges, campaign groups and professional bodies with an interest in health and public health.

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