

Obesity prevention: Navigating the Uneven Playing Field

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Our vision | We want to see

A Scotland where everybody thrives

Our mission | We lead and support work in Scotland to:

- **Prevent disease** through vaccination and preventing the spread of infectious diseases
- **Prolong healthy life** by improving access to and quality of treatment
- **Promote health and wellbeing** by strengthening the building blocks of health



Our purpose

As Scotland's **national** public health body,
Public Health Scotland leads and supports work to

Prevent disease

by providing vaccines
and reducing the
spread of infectious
diseases

Prolong healthy life

supporting access to
high quality healthcare

Promote health

by strengthening the
building blocks of
health for all



Public Health Scotland ambition

We want to see

A Scotland where everybody thrives

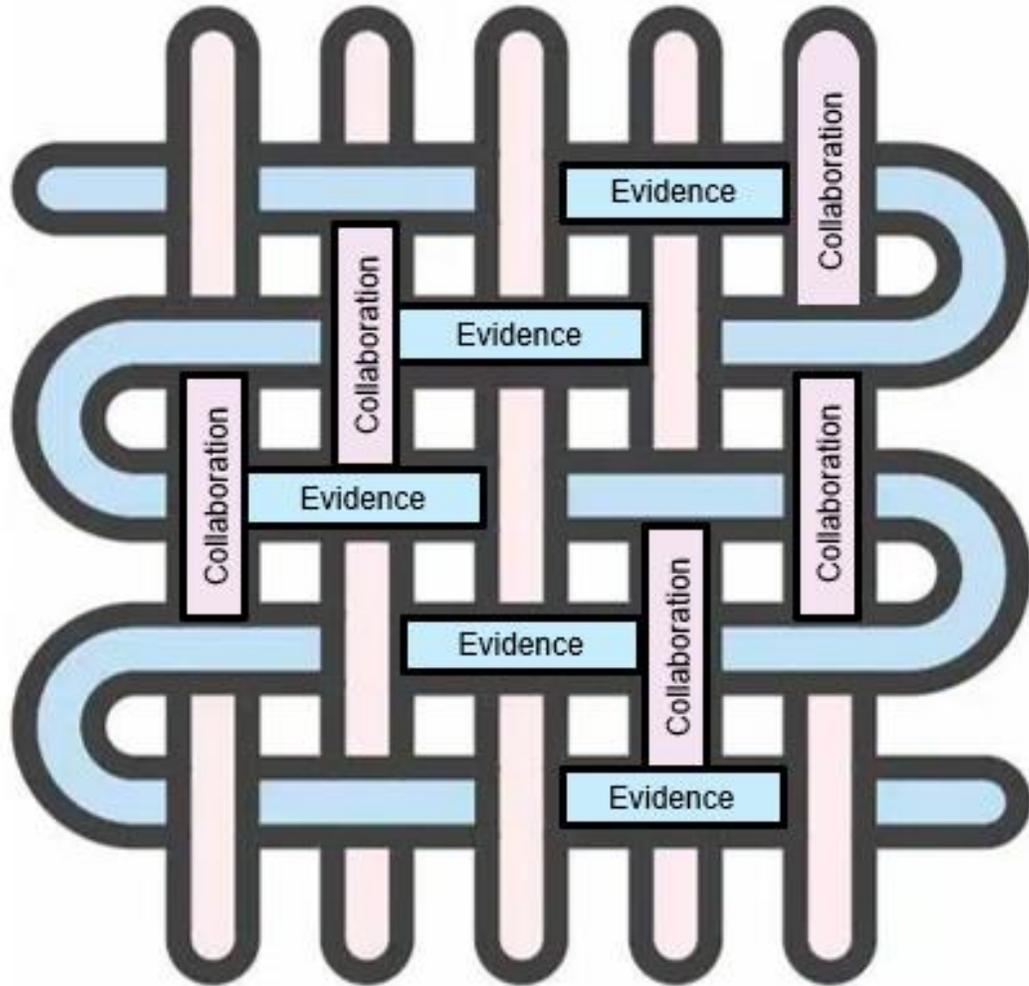
Which means

Life expectancy in
Scotland to improve

A reduction in the
difference in life expectancy
between the poorest and
wealthiest neighbourhoods



Supporting action across the system



Partnerships

Research

Data &
intelligence

Tools &
resources

Monitoring &
evaluation

Briefings



If we do nothing, the future demand on health and social care is projected to increase by 21% by 2043

Two thirds of this increase will be due to increases in:



Cancers



**Cardiovascular
disease**



**Neurological
conditions**

- **36% increase in diabetes (from 307,800 to 419,200 people) by 2044**
- **56% increase in atrial fibrillation (from 113,700 to 177,600 people) by 2044**
- **36% increase in stroke (from 105,000 to 143,226 people) by 2044**

Source: PHS, [Future Burden of Disease, ScotPHO](#)



Good health is not equally shared

Healthy life expectancy, 2019-21



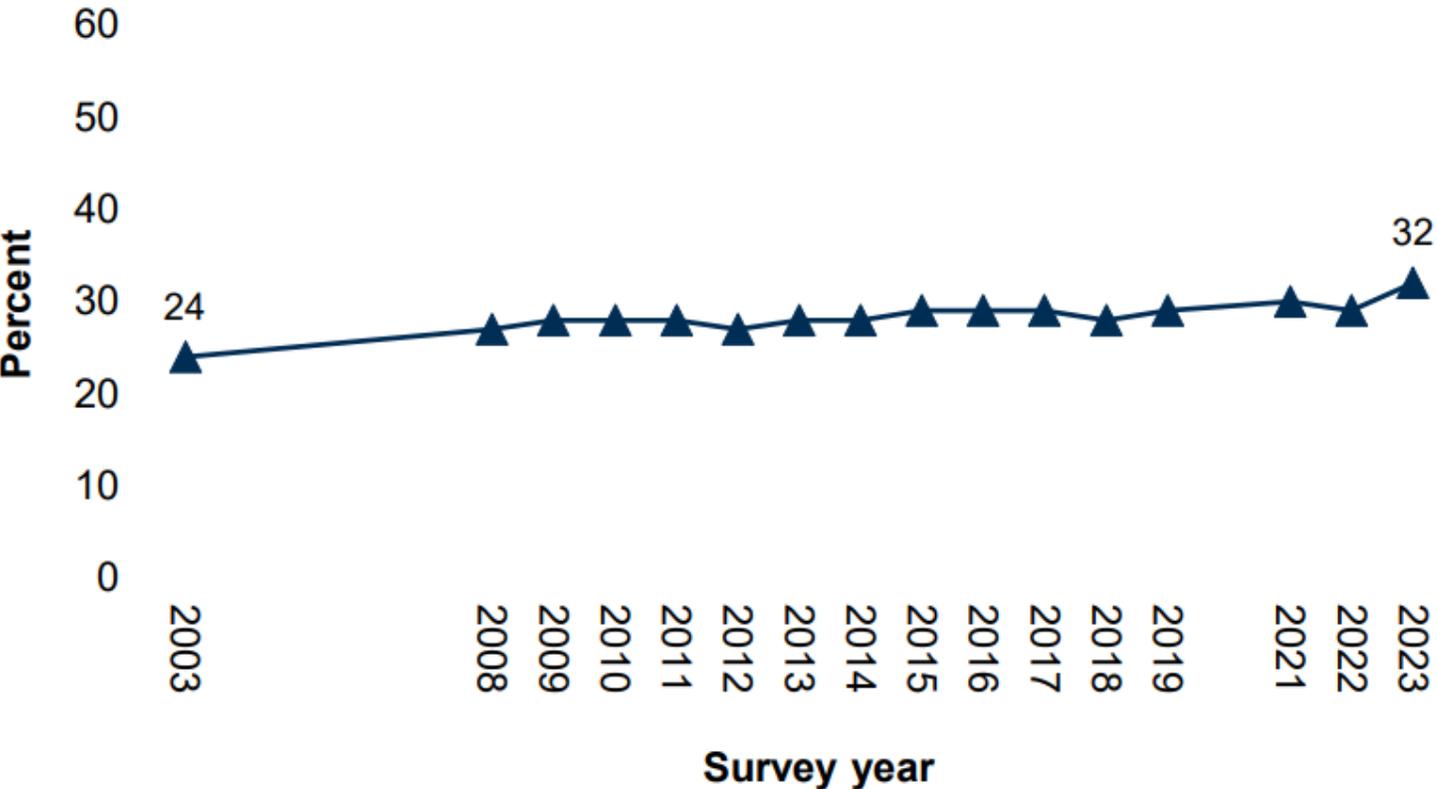
Source, National Records for Scotland 2024.



Many of these preventable conditions relate to diet & physical inactivity

Figure 9A: Adult obesity is at the highest level in the time series

Adults with BMI of 30 or more, 2003 to 2023

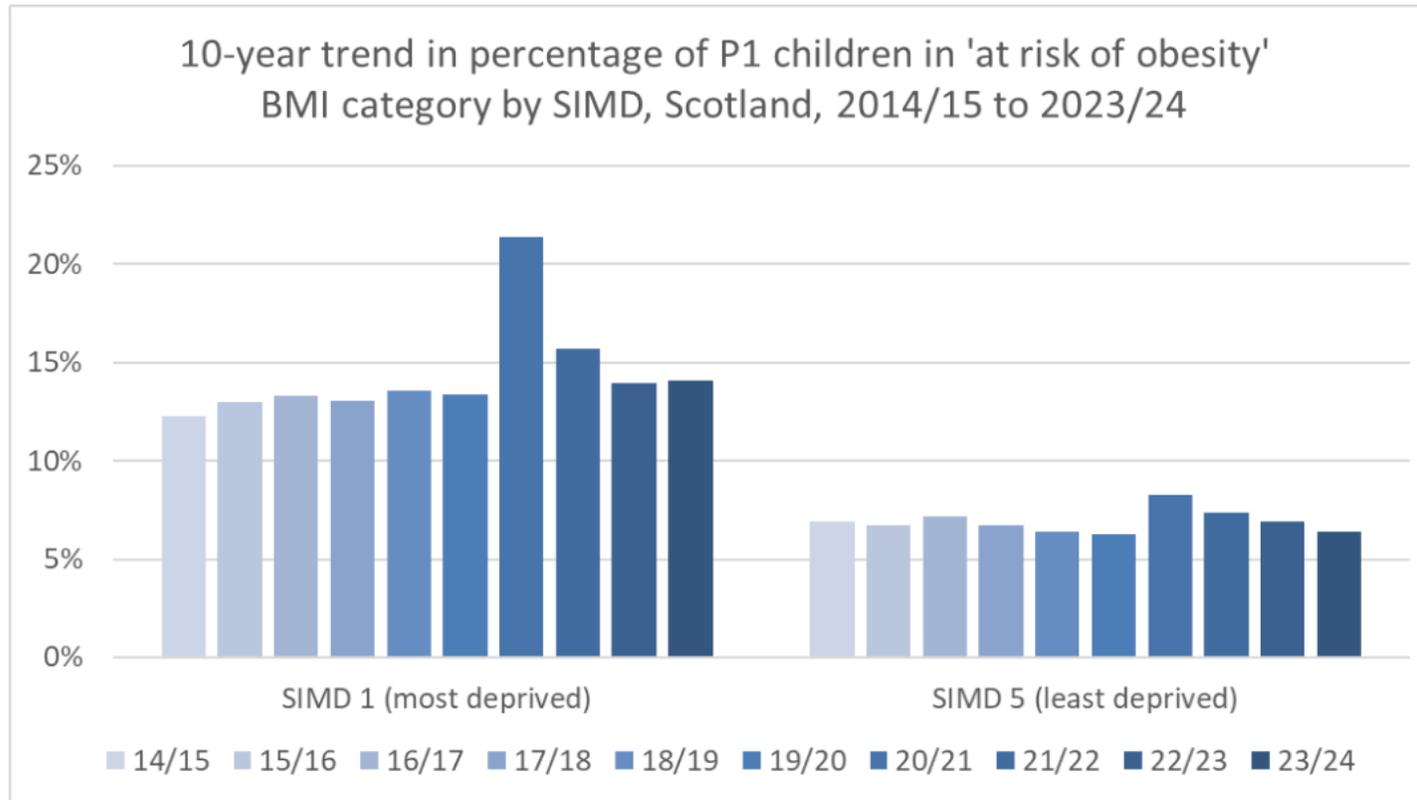


Two-thirds (66%) of adults were classed as living with overweight (including obesity)

Source: [Scottish Health Survey 2023](#)



Child Healthy Weight - Inequalities gap by deprivation



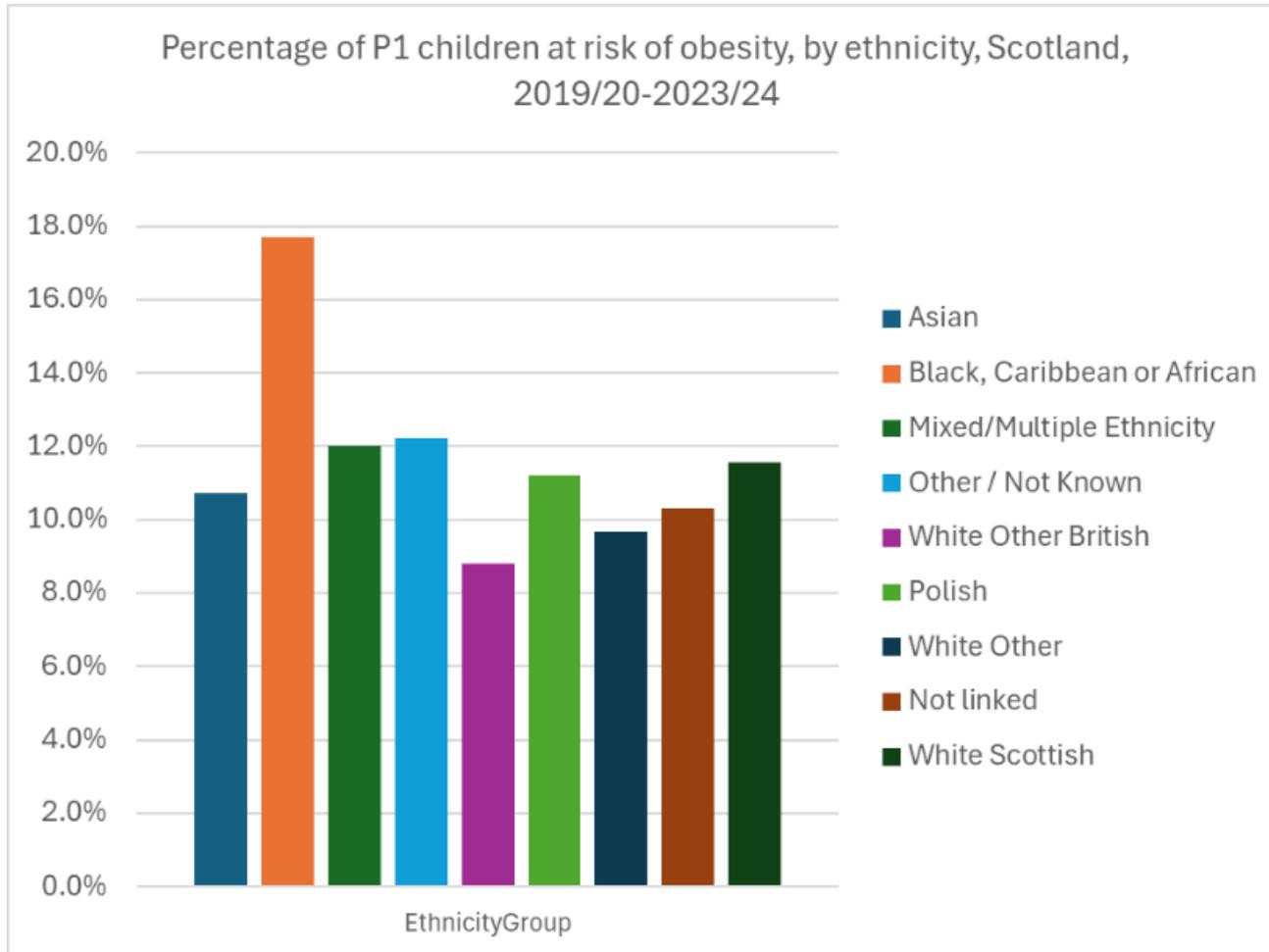
In the school year 2023/24:

- 6.4% of children in the least deprived areas were at risk of obesity – 0.5% point reduction over 10 years
- 14.0% of children in the most deprived areas were at risk of obesity - 1.7% point increase over 10 years

[Source: PHS, BMI of Primary 1 children in Scotland 2022/23](#)



Child Healthy Weight - Inequalities gap by ethnicity



Source: PHS, Body Mass Index of Primary 1 children in Scotland

Primary 1 BMI Statistics 2023/24

- Ethnicity data from linkage to earlier child health reviews
- Highest in those of Black, Caribbean or African ethnicity – 18%
- Lowest in those of White other British ethnicity – 9%



What surrounds us, shapes us



Public Health
Scotland



Health first

Communicating about health and obesity
in Scotland

Publication date: 2 March 2023

A guide created by



Limited access to healthy food, dietary patterns, and physical inactivity play a key role in the development of these conditions

How we communicate about obesity matters. We need to communicate in a way that shows that what's around us, shapes us.

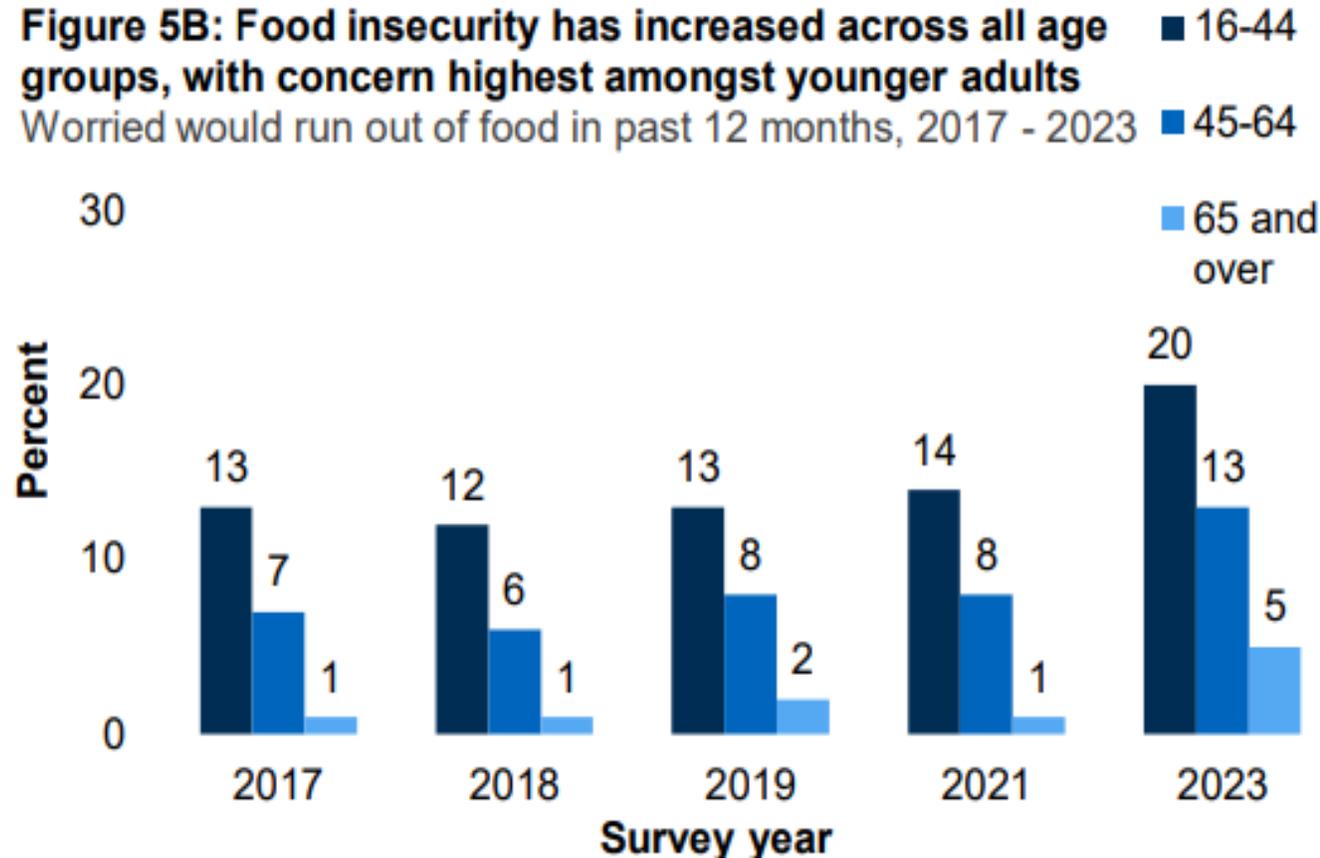
Source: [Health first: Communicating about health and obesity](#)



Food issues intersect with poverty issues

Figure 5B: Food insecurity has increased across all age groups, with concern highest amongst younger adults

Worried would run out of food in past 12 months, 2017 - 2023



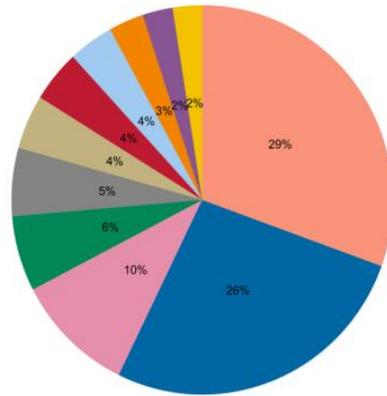
Affordability can be a barrier to a healthy diet
"The most deprived fifth of the population would need to spend 45% of their disposable income on food, rising to 70% for those households with children."

Source: [The Food Foundation_TheBrokenPlate 2025.pdf](#)

Source: [Scottish Health Survey 2023](#)



Food, Health, and sustainability



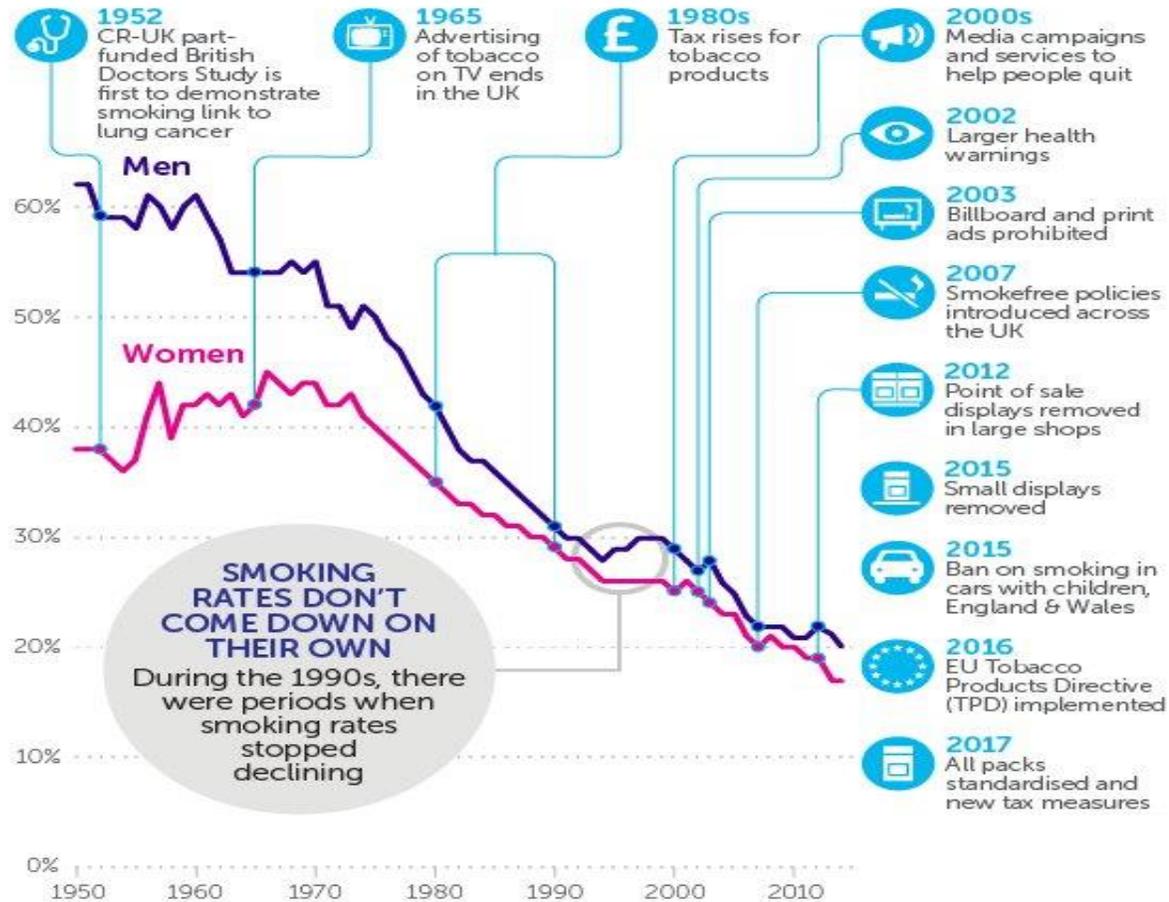
Greenhouse gas emissions associated with food consumed in the UK, by stage in the food system. Source: [Understanding the climate impact of food consumed in Scotland](#)

Source : Sustainable Food Systems concept and framework, Nguyen, H. (2018)



Change is possible, through investment in prevention

SMOKING RATES DECLINE WITH ACTION



We need to work together to deliver a similar reversal in trends around weight and diet

Source: Adult Smoking Habits in Great Britain. Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, ONS

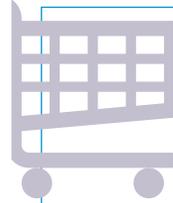
LET'S BEAT CANCER SOONER.
cruk.org



Public Health recommendations for collective action



All food related policies must prioritise access to safe, affordable and healthy food, contributing to a reduction in diet-related health inequalities



Take action on marketing, promotions, price & availability



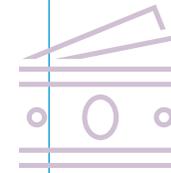
Ensure the places where we live, work, learn, care and play prioritise healthy food options & physical activity



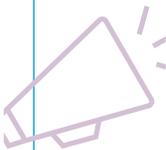
Ensure people have access to effective weight management support services that are free from stigma



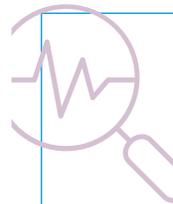
Build on maternal and early years services to build a coherent approach to improving nutrition



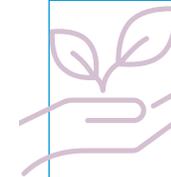
Address food insecurity as a priority and ensure children have the best start in life. This means maximising family incomes through fair work and social security.



Change the way we talk about obesity and poor diet – shifting the narrative away from individual responsibility



Must develop a comprehensive evaluation and monitoring framework to provide evidence on what works



Use policy tools, like Good Food Nations, to support a Scottish food system that achieves triple wins for health, the environment, and the economy

Source: PHS, [Improving Scotland's diet and weight, A position statement on behalf of the Scottish Public Health System](#)



Thank you

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