



Scottish Obesity Alliance response to the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2026-2031

3 September 2026

The Scottish Obesity Alliance (SOA) welcomes the publication of the Scottish Government's Programme for Government and its commitment to improving the nation's health and reducing health inequalities.

Obesity is one of the leading contributors to preventable ill health in Scotland and is associated with a wide range of non-communicable diseases, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and 13 types of cancer. Obesity and oral health are also closely linked through shared risk factors, particularly high consumption of sugary foods and drinks. Action to prevent obesity and support healthy weight therefore has the potential to improve multiple diet-related health outcomes, reduce inequalities, and help relieve pressure on health and care services.

The SOA welcomes commitments to:

- Publish a Diet and Healthy Weight Management Plan.
- Prioritise primary prevention and establish a Prevention Unit and a Scottish Prevention Investment Framework.
- Continue efforts to tackle child poverty and reduce health inequalities.
- Expand Free School Meals and introduce a national breakfast club offer for primary school children.
- Support greater participation in physical activity through measures including free school swimming lessons and initiatives to increase access to sport for children and young people.

However, significant opportunities remain to strengthen Scotland's approach to obesity prevention, healthy weight and nutrition. While the Programme for Government places a welcome emphasis on prevention, much of the detail focuses on healthcare reform, service delivery and treatment. There is limited detail on the population-level measures needed to address the wider drivers of obesity and create healthier environments that support healthy choices for all.

Obesity is not simply the result of individual choices. People's health is shaped by the environments in which they live, work, learn and play. Across Scotland, many people continue to face environments where unhealthy options are more accessible, more heavily promoted and often more affordable than healthier alternatives. Tackling obesity therefore requires action to create healthier food environments and reduce the inequalities that drive poor health outcomes.

The SOA believes further action is required in the following areas:

Investing in primary prevention

The Scottish Government should set out clear plans on how it will increase investment in primary prevention through the Prevention Unit, Scottish Prevention Investment Framework and wider prevention agenda.

The Scottish Government's preventative budgeting pilot highlights the scale of this challenge: just 18% of identified preventative spending was on primary prevention, equivalent to only 2.7% of the total budget reviewed¹. Spending remains weighted towards secondary and tertiary prevention, focused on managing existing illness and risk. The priority should shift the balance of prevention upstream, with clear targets for primary prevention, including measurable improvements in diet, healthy weight and population health.

Creating healthier food environments

People's food choices are shaped by the environments in which they live, learn and work. While we recognise the price cap will help improve food affordability, there is further scope and opportunity for this policy to support healthier food choices and contribute to better public health outcomes.

Further action is also needed to ensure future regulations, such as The Food (Promotion and Placement) (Scotland) Regulations 2025, are underpinned by the new Nutrient Profiling Model (2018) in support of creating healthier food environments and reducing diet-related health inequalities.

Reducing health inequalities

The SOA welcomes the Scottish Government's continued focus on tackling poverty and inequality. Obesity is 50% higher in Scotland's most deprived communities². In 2025,

¹ Scottish Government (2026) *Scottish Budget: Piloting an Approach to Identifying Preventative Spend - Pilot Results*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/piloting-approach-identifying-preventative-spend-scottish-budget/>

² Scottish Government (2025). *The Scottish Health Survey: Volume 1 – Main Report*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available at: [The Scottish Health Survey 2024 - volume 1: main report](#)

households in the lowest income fifth in Scotland would need to spend 45% of their disposable income (after housing costs) to afford a diet in line with the Government-recommended Eatwell Guide, compared with 11% in the highest income fifth³. In 2024, only 50% of adults in the most deprived areas met the recommended physical activity guidelines, compared with 73% in the least deprived areas⁴.

Obesity prevention therefore cannot be separated from the wider conditions in which people live, work and access food and opportunities for physical activity. Action on poverty, food insecurity and obesity should not be siloed.

Access to support and treatment

Prevention and treatment should be viewed as complementary parts of a comprehensive approach to tackling obesity and diet-related health inequalities, and access to treatment should not be shaped by a postcode lottery. The Scottish Government should ensure equitable access to evidence-based obesity support and treatment across Scotland, with clear national standards and action to address geographic inequalities.

As the Programme for Government is taken forward, the SOA encourages the Scottish Government to prioritise:

- Increased investment in primary prevention and public health, with clear targets and measures of impact.
- Embedding obesity prevention across government, including through action on poverty, food insecurity and the wider determinants of health.
- Action to create healthier food environments, including the use of the new Nutrient Profiling Model (2018) to underpin future regulations.
- Measures to reduce obesity-related inequalities, with action focused on the communities facing the greatest barriers to healthy diets and physical activity.
- Ensuring equitable access to evidence-based prevention, weight management and treatment, with clear national standards and action to address geographic variation.
- Strengthening accountability, through clear responsibilities, targets and regular reporting on progress and outcomes.

³ The Food Foundation (2026). *The Broken Plate 2026*. Available at: https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/TFF_The%20Broken%20Plate%202026_FINAL.pdf

⁴ Scottish Government (2025). *The Scottish Health Survey: Volume 1 – Main Report*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available at: [The Scottish Health Survey 2024 - volume 1: main report](#)

Julie Cameron, Head of Obesity Action Scotland and Convener of the Scottish Obesity Alliance, said:

"The Programme for Government rightly places prevention at the heart of improving Scotland's health and public services. The challenge now is turning that ambition into action.

Scotland continues to experience high levels of obesity and stark health inequalities. If we are serious about prevention, we must make healthy choices easier, more accessible, and more affordable for everyone. We look forward to working with the Scottish Government to ensure the forthcoming Diet and Healthy Weight Management Plan delivers the bold action needed to improve health and reduce inequalities."

Disclaimer: The SOA works to represent the collective voice and interests of all its members. However, there may be specific instances where individual member organisations do not hold a position on a particular issue. Accordingly, while this response reflects the SOA's collective perspective, it should not be taken to represent the formal position of every member organisation in every instance.

About the Scottish Obesity Alliance

The **Scottish Obesity Alliance** (SOA) is a coalition of organisations committed to improving the nation's health by preventing obesity and supporting people living with obesity. The SOA brings together charities, professional bodies, royal colleges, healthcare organisations and other stakeholders to advocate for evidence-based policies that promote healthy weight, reduce health inequalities and create healthier environments across Scotland.

The Scottish Obesity Alliance is convened by **Obesity Action Scotland**, which provides the SOA's secretariat function.

For further information, please contact us at: info@scottishobesityalliance.org