

**Scottish Government's Call for Views: *Advisory Group on Economic Recovery*****Consultation Response from Obesity Action Scotland**Closing date: 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020**Question 3**

**The crisis will impact differently on different groups in society, and on different parts of the labour market; and, has already revealed some thorny issues about relative wages across key occupations. What will the implications of the recovery be for different groups, unemployment and on the nature of work? How is the recovery likely to impact on socio-economic inequality as a whole?**

We know that prior to the COVID-19 outbreak the diet of the Scottish population was poor and that those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds had even poorer diets (1).<sup>1</sup> These poor dietary habits are ingrained and we have been missing health based dietary targets for nearly 20 years (1).

Recent surveys in England and in Scotland show that since the COVID-19 outbreak our diets have changed: we eat out of boredom more and eat more unhealthy foods such as cakes and biscuits, confectionery or savoury snacks. We also eat more long-shelf-life foods that are usually nutritionally inferior to fresh foods. With such whole-population trend it is likely that diets of those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have got or will get even poorer. The recovery from the current crisis needs to include measures not only to address this inequality but also to improve quality of diet in Scotland overall. As the new Global Nutrition Report (2020) highlighted (2):

“undernourished people have weaker immune systems and may be at greater risk of severe illness due to the virus. At the same time, poor metabolic health, including obesity and diabetes, is strongly linked to worse Covid-19 outcomes, including risk of hospitalisation and death. People who already suffer as a consequence of inequities – including the poor, women and children, those living in fragile or conflict-affected states, minorities, refugees and the unsheltered – are particularly affected by both the virus and the impact of containment measures. It is essential that they are protected, especially when responses are implemented. Good nutrition is an essential part of an individual's defence against Covid-19. Nutritional

resilience is a key element of a society's readiness to combat the threat. Focusing on nutritional well-being provides opportunities for establishing synergies between public health and equity, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”(2)

As highlighted in a recent report from the Fraser of Allander Institute (3), as well as in the Global Nutrition report (2020), we need to act fast to recover from this crisis: “The adjustment to this path may need to be undertaken very rapidly, as the resilience of the world economy and of individual people will need to be rebuilt as rapidly as possible, in order to both restore global well-being – again, in the foreseeable future, probably to levels far below that to which we were accustomed and with a far greater concern for inequalities and sustainability”. (3)

The measures required to tackle overweight and obesity are already well rehearsed and developed and require fundamental change to the food environment to support everyone to achieve dietary goals. We require legislation and enabling measures to shift the marketing, advertising and sales environment to ensure the healthy choice is the easy choice in both retail and out of home sectors.

As the out of home sector reopens, we must enable, support and ensure the food on sale is nutritious and contributing to a healthy diet and the achievement of dietary goals.

- (1) Food Standards Scotland (2018) Situation Report: The Scottish Diet: It needs to change. 2018 update.
- (2) 2020 Global Nutrition Report: Action on equity to end malnutrition. Bristol, UK: Development Initiatives.
- (3) Goudie, Andrew (2020) Re-thinking our Global Economic Future. Glasgow, UK: Fraser of Allander Institute, University of Strathclyde.

## Question 4

**What can be done now to ensure the transition to a wellbeing-oriented, inclusive economy on a transition to net zero. How can the wellbeing of the people of Scotland flourish and what are the environmental implications of the crisis?**

Environmental health and sustainability and human health and wellbeing are inseparably linked. This link has been highlighted and explored in a 2019 report from a Lancet commission on The Global Syndemic of Obesity, Undernutrition, and Climate Change (1)<sup>2</sup>. The report explains:

“Malnutrition in all its forms, including obesity, undernutrition, and other dietary risks, is the leading cause of poor health globally. In the near future, the health effects of climate change

will considerably compound these health challenges. Climate change can be considered a pandemic because of its sweeping effects on the health of humans and the natural systems we depend on (i.e., planetary health). These three pandemics—obesity, undernutrition, and climate change—represent The Global Syndemic that affects most people in every country and region worldwide. They constitute a syndemic, or synergy of epidemics, because they co-occur in time and place, interact with each other to produce complex sequelae, and share common underlying societal drivers.” (1) The commission highlighted systemic drivers: undernutrition, obesity and climate change and recommended comprehensive actions to address them. We strongly recommend that the Advisory Group on the Economic Recovery acknowledges this report and acts on it. Overall, the Commission proposed the following nine broad recommendations, under which sit more than 20 actions:

- a) Think in Global Syndemic terms to create a focus on common systemic drivers that need common actions
- b) Join up the silos of thinking and action to create platforms to work collaboratively on common systemic drivers and double-duty or triple-duty actions
- c) Strengthen national and international governance levers to fully implement policy actions which have been agreed upon through international guidelines, resolutions and treaties
- d) Strengthen municipal governance levers to mobilise action at the local level and create pressure for national action
- e) Strengthen civil society engagement to encourage systemic change and pressure for policy action at all levels of government to address The Global Syndemic
- f) Reduce the influence of large commercial interests in the public policy development process to enable governments to implement policies in the public interest to benefit the health of current and future generations, the environment, and the planet
- g) Strengthen accountability systems for policy actions to address The Global Syndemic
- h) Create sustainable and health-promoting business models for the 21st century to shift business outcomes from a short-term profit-only focus to sustainable, profitable models that explicitly include benefits to society and the environment
- i) Focus research on The Global Syndemic determinants and actions to create an evidence base of systemic drivers and actions, including indigenous and traditional approaches to health and wellbeing

Key system to focus on when consider human health and wellbeing alongside environmental health is the food system. The current food system is threatening both human health and environmental sustainability. The current COVID-19 crisis quickly highlighted issues linked to the way food system operates and to what values it works to. The new 2020 Global Nutrition Report (2) recommended adjusting the current food system to become equitable, resilient and sustainable. Such a food system would ensure that healthy and sustainably produced food is the most accessible, affordable and desirable choice for all. Such a healthy food environment where the healthy option is the default option, is what Obesity Action Scotland

have been campaigning for as well. To achieve that the sectors must work together to mainstream nutrition into all elements of the food system. Specifically, Global Nutrition Report (2020) recommended:

- Implement strong regulatory and policy frameworks to support healthier diets for all at country and community level and across sectors, from production to consumption
- Optimise agricultural subsidies and increase public investment for producing a broader range of more diverse and healthier foods
- Provide support for public transport schemes and shorter supply chains for fresh-food delivery products, particularly to the most nutritionally disadvantaged or harder-to-reach groups
- Implement, monitor and evaluate evidence-based food policies to support healthy, sustainable and equitable diets, such as fiscal, reformulation, school- and worksite-based, labelling and marketing policies
- Hold the food industry accountable for producing and marketing healthier and more sustainable food products through strengthened mechanisms
- Strengthen and increase research spending to address major nutrition questions, identify cost-effective solutions and stimulate innovation

Many actions that support health and healthier food environment offer return on investment. For example, it was shown that almost all the identified by the McKinsey Institute report (3) obesity interventions are cost-effective for society—savings on health-care costs and higher productivity could outweigh the direct investment required to deliver the intervention when assessed over the full lifetime of target population. In the United Kingdom, such a program could reverse rising obesity, saving about \$1.2 billion a year for the National Health Service (NHS). (3)

A WHO-UNICEF-Lancet commission report published in February this year (4) presented the case for placing children, aged 0–18 years, at the centre of the Sustainable Development Goals, recommending that governments harness coalitions across sectors to overcome ecological and commercial pressures to ensure children receive their rights and entitlements now and a liveable planet in the years to come (4). The report argued that “Just as good health and nutrition in the prenatal period and early years lay the foundation for a healthy life course, the learning and social skills we acquire at a young age provide the basis for later development and support a strong national policy and economy.” (4)

Finally, as food systems are a major driver of poor health and environmental degradation, EAT Lancet commission (5) proposed a model of a Planetary Health Diet – diet beneficial to human health as well as planetary health. The diet is designed to be universal for all food cultures and production systems in the world, with a high potential of local adaptation and scalability. Within boundaries of food production, the diet can be adapted to make meals that are consistent with different food cultures and cuisines. The report highlighted that achieving

healthy diets from sustainable food systems for everyone will require substantial shifts towards healthy dietary patterns, large reductions in food losses and waste, and major improvements in food production practices (5). The Commission concluded that global food systems could provide win-win diets to everyone by 2050 and beyond. However, achieving this goal would require rapid adoption of numerous changes and unprecedented global collaboration. They called it a Great Food Transformation and outlined five strategies to achieve this:

- Seek international and national commitment to shift towards healthy diets
- Re-orient agricultural priorities from producing high quantities of food to producing healthy food
- Sustainably intensify food production to increase high-quality output
- Strong and coordinated governance of land and oceans
- At least halve food losses and waste, in line with global sustainable development goals

This Planetary Health Diet approach is being advocated by the EAT Forum and it has received large support from food industry, research organisations and third sector (6).

The Scottish Government published in 2018 their *Diet and Healthy Weight Delivery Plan*. The outbreak of coronavirus has highlighted how important healthy weight is and it is therefore crucial that our economic recovery from COVID-19 has both treatment and prevention policies for obesity and other diet related diseases at its core. To truly deliver an economy that values the wellbeing of the people of Scotland we must ensure measures to improve the diet of the population and drive the redesign of the food economy.

- (1) Swinburn BA, Kraak VI, Allender S, et al (2019) The Global Syndemic of Obesity, Undernutrition, and Climate Change: The Lancet Commission report. *Lancet* 393:791–846. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)32822-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32822-8)
- (2) 2020 Global Nutrition Report: Action on equity to end malnutrition. Bristol, UK: Development Initiatives.
- (3) Dobbs R, Sawers C, Thompson F, et al (2014) Overcoming obesity. An initial economic analysis. McKinsey Institute. Discussion paper.
- (4) Clark et al (2020) A future for the world's children? A WHO-UNICEF-Lancet Commission. *The Lancet* 395(10224), p605-658.
- (5) Willett et al (2019) Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *The Lancet* 393(10170), p447-492.
- (6) <https://eatforum.org/about/partnerships/>