

National Assembly for Wales

Children and Young People Committee

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Inquiry into Childhood Obesity

Evidence from : The Royal College of Nursing

The Royal College of Nursing is of the view that childhood obesity is a growing problem that warrants coordinated and urgent action if we are to prevent inevitable future pressure on our health services.

We know that the rates of childhood obesity in Wales are the highest in the UK and that these rates are predicted to rise in future years. Obesity is a known risk factor in a number of chronic adult illnesses and also has an impact of the quality of life and self esteem of children and young people.

To date the Welsh Government's response to addressing the issue has been to develop programmes that focus on promoting regular physical activity and on maintaining a healthy diet. Such programmes aim to provide the individual with information and education about the risks associated with lack of exercise and poor diets. This is too simplistic an approach and is based on the premise that individuals have complete control over their health related behaviours.

A number of factors in society affect children's health and wellbeing and the health and wellbeing of the adults they will become. This include social connections, relationships and networks, employment, the impact of the local economy, a person's housing circumstances, their physical and social environment and their educational achievement. Obesity, like many of the health behaviours that are significant to the development of chronic disease, is associated with social and economic deprivation across all age ranges.

Tackling the problem of obesity is therefore complex and requires action at a number of levels. Action is needed to improve the availability and access to healthier food for people living in deprived areas on low incomes. We live in an environment that encourages obesity, there are few opportunities for children to play outside and even where they exist parents are often fearful to allow their children to play outside. Children are bombarded with advertisements that emphasise unhealthy food and drink and the food industry produce food high in salt and saturated fats.

We welcomed the proposals by the Welsh Government consultation on Healthy Eating in School (Nutritional Standards and Requirements) (Wales) regulations, however we are deeply concerned that the regulations will not have an impact on the **Royal College Of Nursing Submission to the National Assembly for Wales' Children and Young People Committee inquiry into childhood obesity.**

food that children bring into school themselves i.e. in packed lunches and snacks nor will they address the issue of young people leaving school premises at lunchtimes and buying high fat, high sugar food and drinks to consume. Given that the uptake rate of school meals for primary school aged children in a large local authority in the South Wales Valleys was only 37% in this current year<sup>1</sup>, we are of the view that the Welsh Government must address these wider issues if we are to address the poor diet of children and young people in Wales.

If public health strategies are to have an impact on childhood obesity they must address child nutrition, the exploitation of children by food advertising, transport and neighbourhood planning policies so that children are able to walk or cycle to and from school and have safe play opportunities and the availability of fresh, healthy produce in our deprived neighbourhoods.

This requires public health strategies to become more integrated, for this to happen there needs to be increased strategic collaboration and partnership working with key stakeholders, particularly local government and the third sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Caerphilly County Borough Council Directorate of Education and Leisure, *Service Improvement Progress Report*. 2012/2013