

A FITTER FUTURE FOR ALL

**Obesity Prevention Framework for
Northern Ireland
2011-2021**

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Background

The prevalence of people who are overweight and obese has been steadily rising in Northern Ireland, and in the western world, over the last few decades. It has been described as an “obesity time-bomb”ⁱ, given the impact that obesity can have on physical and mental health and wellbeing. Evidence has shown that, while weight gain is the result of a relatively simple energy imbalance, the causes that underpin changes to energy intake and expenditure are very complex and cover issues such as social and individual psychology, physiology, food production and consumption, individual activity, and the built environment. These factors, known as the “obesogenic environment”ⁱⁱ, need cross-sectoral and cross-government action to effectively change. In addition, many wider determinants of poor health (such as health inequalities, poverty, mental health, deprivation, and structural barriers) can also play an important role.

Approach to date

Prior to 2006, the main approach to addressing this issue was through actions that promoted participation in physical activity and maintaining a healthy diet. However, based on growing research on the need for an integrated approach, Fit Futures was published in 2006ⁱⁱⁱ and it took an integrated approach to addressing childhood obesity. Further evidence emerged, particularly from the Foresight Report in 2007^{iv}, on the importance of effectively intervening throughout an individual’s life. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has therefore led the development of a cross-sectoral, integrated life-course framework to prevent and address obesity within Northern Ireland over the next 10 years.

Obesity Prevention Framework

Aim

This Framework aims to *“empower the population of Northern Ireland to make healthy choices, and reduce the level of harm related to overweight and obesity, by creating an environment that supports and promotes a physically active lifestyle and a healthy diet”*.

Target

In addition, the following overarching target has been set: *to reduce the level of obesity in Northern Ireland to the 2005-06 level by 2021.*

Objectives

Prevention is typically taken forward through action to address two main areas – improving diet and nutrition, and increasing participation in physical activity. Acknowledging this, two overarching objectives for the Framework have been set: *to increase the percentage of people eating a healthy, nutritionally balanced diet; and to increase the percentage of the population regularly participating in physical activity.*

Outcomes

Chapter 5 sets out a range of short, medium, and long term outcomes that delivery partners will seek to deliver in relation to obesity. These outcomes have been structured by lifecourse stages, and have been developed using a logic model approach. In addition, the short-term outcomes are grouped by a range of key settings in Annex A.

Next Steps

Prior to implementation, the framework will be subject to a formal public consultation exercise. This process will provide all interested parties with a further opportunity to feed into the final document. Once the consultation has ended, the framework will be finalised and processes will be put in place to oversee the implementation and delivery of the outcomes, and to monitor progress against the indicators and target.