

Health Select Committee- Report: Impact of physical activity and diet on health

Summary

- **This paper provides details of the Health Select Committee’s report into the ‘Impact of physical activity and diet on health’, released this morning.**
- **The report focuses on the central message that physical activity must be seen as a key health priority independent of diet, echoing ukactive’s calls that physical activity plays a wider role than obesity.**
- **This report marks a major step forward in parliamentary recognition of physical inactivity as a top-tier health concern in its own right.**
- **The report calls on the NHS and Local Authorities to prioritise physical activity and effective lifestyle interventions over the coming years**

The Health Select Committee has today published its final report into the ‘Impact of physical activity and diet on health’, following a substantial inquiry which involved the submission of written responses as well as a number of hearings that saw ukactive’s CEO David Stalker give oral evidence to the Committee.

Drawing on evidence provided by ukactive, the report clearly emphasises the promotion of physical activity as a top tier health concern, as suggested by the very first recommendation made in the report.

Dr Sarah Wollaston MP, the Chair of the Committee, who herself has referred to exercise as a ‘wonder drug’, stated that overall “the message that we hope will come across in our report is that we need to get Britain moving”.

Report Summary-

- A core message from this inquiry is that physical inactivity in its own right has huge health benefits totally independent of a person’s weight. The importance of this- regardless of weight, age, gender, or other factors- needs to be clearly communicated.
- Interventions focused on encouraging individuals to change their behaviour with regard to diet and physical activity need to be underpinned by broader, population-level measures.
- The Committee regards it as ‘inexplicable and unacceptable’ that the NHS is now spending more on bariatric surgery for obesity than on a national roll-out of intensive lifestyle intervention programmes that were first shown to cut obesity and prevent diabetes over a decade ago.

Key points –

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- Despite the overwhelming evidence to support the promotion of physical activity, doctors and other clinical professionals are not yet playing an active enough role in promoting this and, in some circumstances, may be adding to the problem.
- The NHS needs to “get better at focusing on prevention.” The incoming Government needs to ensure that prevention becomes the focus, preventative strategies and early intervention with regards to activity are key to preventing and managing over 20 types of chronic conditions such as diabetes and cancer.
- Infrastructure and environmental factors are central in promoting physical activity, and we perhaps do not currently have appropriate environments to encourage activity.
- The Committee claimed it was ‘struck’ by the apparent inequalities in physical activity rates, in particular with regards to the gender gap. Whilst the Committee thought Sport England’s ‘This Girl Can’ campaign was excellent, it is clear that lots of barriers still exist in preventing women and girls from being active.

Committee’s recommendations to Government-

Below are just some of the key recommendations put forward to the next Government by the committee.

- The next Government, in conjunction with Public Health England and health professionals, needs to send out a loud and clear message that activity is one of the very best interventions that people can implement for their health.
- The Committee calls on the NHS, as well as local authorities, to make tackling inactivity it’s ‘core business.’
- The next Government should prioritise prevention, health promotion and early intervention to tackle the health inequalities and avoidable harm resulting from poor diet and physical inactivity.
- The Committee recommends that the next Government work with royal colleges and Health Education England to improve the understanding clinicians have of the medical benefits of physical activity, and are equipped to promote this to their patients.

How will all of this be achieved? The committee agree that turning the tide of inactivity will require long-term investment, and believe a cross-government approach would be most effective in tackling physical inactivity at a national level. Whilst both national and individual interventions can be utilised, population-level interventions impact far greater numbers than could ever benefit from individual interventions.

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A successful strategy for tackling these problems, according to the Committee, should mirror the successful strategy on tobacco, and be multi-level, spanning national and local government down to every citizen.

Impact on the sector-

This report is likely to have wide-ranging consequences for the sector over the course of the next Parliament.

Firstly, it shows that we've moved the debate on from talking about obesity. The report's findings could not be clearer; physical activity is worth discussing in its own right. Now, we can move on at the top level to talk about how we actually begin the process of getting Britain moving.

The Committee's findings mean that the surge of activity the leisure sector has experienced in public health will now need to be recognised at CCG and NHS levels; this may mean more funding for physical activity interventions funded not just by local authorities, but by traditional health bodies also.

Although the report talks about measures to do with diet and regulation of those areas, they remained focused on the positive changes that can be made; that requires supporting organisations with an interest in health and fitness to deliver their programmes and projects.

With this comes the added responsibility upon the sector to evidence its impact and provide a reputable, evidence-based response to the challenge of physical inactivity.

Further Information-

- Full copies of the Health Select Committee report can be found here- <http://www.parliament.uk/healthcom>