

Guidance

Ireland: Obesity

Part of the 5 nations programme on obesity.

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Introduction

The Department of Health (DH) has established a steering group to oversee the development of an [Obesity policy and action plan for Ireland](#). This consultation document sets out possible policy and intervention options in the context of prevention and management of overweight and obesity and is intended to support the consultation process.

Three consultation events are being held to inform and guide this process, with:

- invited stakeholders
- Health care professionals and service providers (based on a model of care for obesity developed by the Royal College of Physicians (RCPI) Policy Group on Obesity (www.rcpi.ie)).
- children and young people

The findings from these consultations will be considered by the steering group where a consultation report will be developed and made available on the [HSE website](#).

Some of the reasons of the obesity epidemic are a result of:

- Obesity is caused by a complex multifaceted system of factors which include high calorie diet, lack of physical activity and psychological, emotional and genetic factors.
- Advertising, high calorie food choice, environments facilitating lack of exercise and activity all add to the causes of the epidemic.
- Evidence shows that obesity has a tipping point - once gained, weight is difficult to lose.
- Prevention is the key to turning the tide of obesity.
- Modest weight loss (by 5–10% of initial weight) reduces the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, improves blood pressure and reduces total cholesterol.

- Untreated obesity has demonstrated an emergence of pre-diabetes, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and sleep apnoea in children. Conditions once seen only in adults with predisposing incidences in cardiovascular disease as adults. <http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/COSIreport2014.pdf>
- Success in treatments offered is dependent on the understandings of the cause of obesity.
- Research shows that many people find it difficult to maintain weight loss and there is often a gradual weight regain.
- It is known that some specific population groups including children, adolescents, pregnant women, individuals with mental illness and those with intellectual and physical disabilities must be considered as high risk and resourced appropriately. <https://www.rcpi.ie/news/publications/author/rcpi-policy-group-on-obesity/>

Policy guidelines;

A Healthy Ireland, where everyone can enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential, where wellbeing is valued and supported at every level of society and is everyone's responsibility.

[Healthy Ireland](#) is our national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Ireland. Its main focus is on prevention and keeping people healthier for longer. Healthy Ireland's goals are to:

- Increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life
- Reduce health inequalities
- Protect the public from threats to health and wellbeing
- Create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland

Healthy Ireland takes a whole-of-Government and whole-of-society approach to improving health and wellbeing and the quality of people's lives. (www.health.gov.ie)

Ireland's first ever National Physical Activity Plan which aims to get at least half a million more Irish people taking regular exercise within ten years was launched early 2016

The key target is to increase the number of people taking regular exercise by 1% a year over ten years – that's around 50,000 people every year or half a million in total – by making exercise a normal part of everyday life and giving people more opportunities to be active.

The emphasis is on fun and enjoyment but the goal couldn't be more serious, as seven out of ten adults don't get enough exercise. At least €5.5 million in funding across government has been ring-fenced to implement the Plan in 2016, comprising sports measures, Healthy Ireland initiatives, Sport Ireland programme funding, and education projects.

Key features include:

- Increase the number of people taking regular exercise by 50,000 every year for the next ten years;
- A new annual campaign to encourage more people to get active more often, including social media campaigns and a new Physical Activity Week as part of the European Week of Sport;
- Support 500 new community walking groups, and extend the Active School Flag Programme to another 500 schools;
- Health professionals will get further training on using physical activity to prevent or treat chronic conditions;
- Build on the success of Get Ireland Walking by setting up new initiatives like Get Ireland Swimming, Get Ireland Cycling and Get Ireland Running;
- The getirelandactive.ie website will be expanded as a one-stop-shop for physical activity, including a public database of national sports and recreation facilities;
- There will be a new push to get employers to encourage Healthy Workplace initiatives through walking and exercise activities, standing desks and other measures;
- More physical activity will be provided for people with physical or mental disabilities through guidelines and support materials;
- New guidelines will be developed on sedentary behaviour, including warnings about the dangers of lengthy inactivity;
- The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment will finalise a new PE curriculum framework at Senior Cycle level;
- A new school subject called 'Wellbeing' will be launched next September as part of the new Junior Cycle to include Physical Education;

Healthy lifestyles will be promoted in primary and secondary schools. Physical activity will be used as an educational tool, especially at primary level, and a Professional Development Support Service on physical activity will be set up for teachers. (www.health.gov.ie)

The HSE have identified in the NSP 2016 to;**1. Reduce chronic diseases**

- Include prevention, early detection and self-management in the Integrated Care Programmes
- Support implementation of 'Making Every Contact Count'
- Support implementation of obesity policy and action plan
- Increase opportunities for physical activity with a range of partners

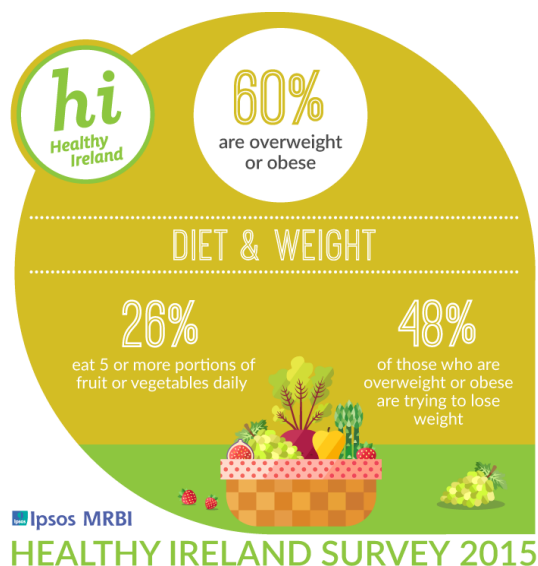
2. Healthy Childhood

- Commence implementation of Nurture, Infant Health and Wellbeing Programme
- Implement revised child health programme

- Promote and increase breastfeeding uptake Rates
- Support the development of a *Healthy Ireland* workplace framework in partnership with the DoH.
- Raise service user awareness of the importance of reducing the known and preventable key risk factors for chronic illness through support for the implementation of 'Making Every Contact Count'.

3. **Healthy Eating and Active Living**

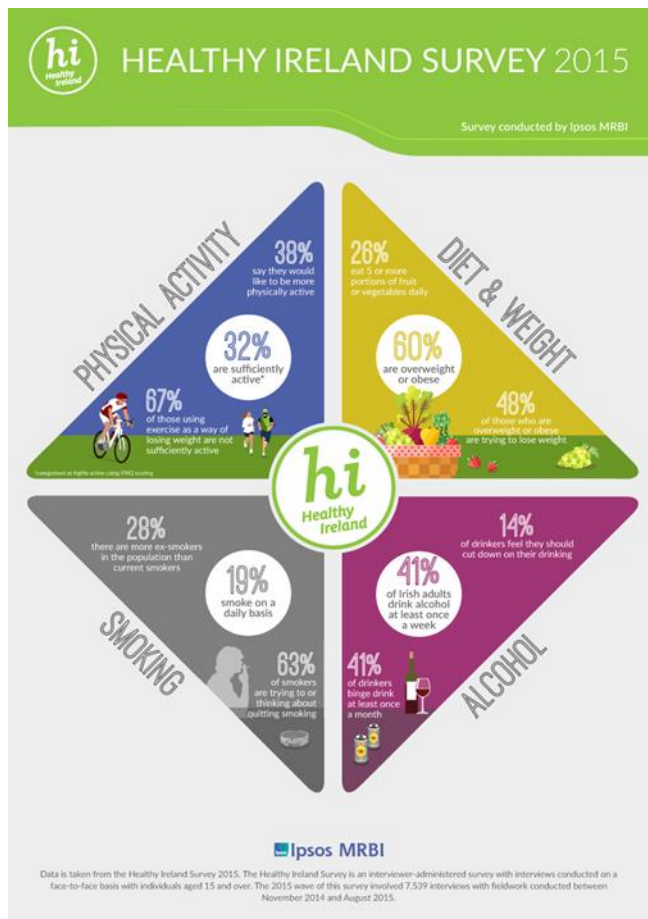
- ▶ Develop a three year HEAL implementation plan incorporating actions from the DoH National Obesity Policy and National Physical Activity Plan.
- ▶ Develop a model of delivery for a National Exercise Referral Framework in line with National Physical Activity Plan recommendations.
- Increase opportunities for physical activity in partnership with other organisations such as the expansion of 'park run', with a focus on disadvantaged areas and young people.
- Prioritise training of staff in national programmes and initiatives promoting healthy eating in infants, children and young people and their families.
- ▶ Develop and implement a HSE Healthy Food and Nutrition Policy including national clinical guideline for identification and management of under-nutrition.



Healthy Childhood

- ▶ Provide national oversight to the implementation of child health priorities (screening; immunisation; early intervention) in partnership with primary care and acute hospital services, in line with outcome one of *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*.
- ▶ Begin the phased implementation of the revised evidence-based universal child health screening and development programme, including communication of key changes and the development of training programmes and standards to support service delivery.

- ▶ Commence the implementation of the key components of the Nurture, Infant Health and Wellbeing Programme, which will include public information and education, staff training and supports, and the development of an integrated service delivery model.
- ▶ Support the phased implementation of the action plan for breastfeeding 2015–2020 and increased participation rates.
(Health Services National Implementation Plan 2015–2017)



Facts about obesity in Ireland

Irish studies have shown that 2 out of every 3 adults are overweight or obese (www.safefood.ie accessed on 28.09.2015).

1 in 4 primary school children and 1 in 5 teenagers are overweight or obese (www.esri.ie 2015).

The Growing Up in Ireland longitudinal study's (www.gui.ie) recent data show that rates of overweight and obesity have decreased at age 7, and stabilised at age 9, while the overall incidence remains of concern.

Obesity in adulthood drives the development and worsens the outcome of chronic diseases including cancer (World Cancer Research Fund International), Type 2 diabetes and dementia. Between 70% and 80% of health care costs in Europe are

spent on chronic diseases ([Report of the Seanad Public Consultation Committee, 18 September 2013](#)).

Up to 80% of this illness burden is preventable primarily through following a physically active and healthy eating lifestyle (RCPI, 2014).

Core principles for healthcare professionals should be;

- Know the needs of individuals, communities and populations and the services available to meet their needs
- Be aware of the resources available to meet the needs and how to access the resources.
- Understand the health promotion, protection and prevention tools that can facilitate their work.
- Engage in staff training to promote healthier lifestyles for people (HSE NSP 2016)

Interventions

Population

Improve signposting to credible, non-commercial and evidence-informed sources of information and advice on physical activity and diet including infant and child nutrition:

- [Safefood](#)
- [HealthPromotion.ie](#)
- [Healthy Ireland](#)

Support effective community-based programmes to enhance knowledge and skills regarding healthy eating, for example:

- [Healthy Food Made Easy](#)
- [Triple P - Parenting Programme](#)

Safefood provides information about safe and healthy eating with hints and tips for parents on preventing obesity in children. Using social media it shares motivational/support techniques to support healthier choices, food safety information and gives the latest nutritional advice.

Enhance the effectiveness of social networks and community groups in addressing overweight and obesity, for example:

- Counterweight
- Motivation
- Operation Transformation which is sponsored by Safefood.ie

Support actions within the [National guidelines on physical activity](#) to develop a public awareness, education and communication strategy. This includes an annual physical activity promotion campaign, for example:

- Community games (www.communitygames.ie)
- local sports partnerships
- Special Olympics Ireland (www.specialolympics.ie)

The Department of Health has worked with the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, on the revised Children's Commercial Communication Code to restrict marketing of high fat, high salt and high sugar foods and drinks. They have also been asked to comment on the latest draft of the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland of their voluntary code review of the rules relating to the advertising and marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages.

The Department of Health has launched Ireland's first ever National Physical Activity Plan (2016)

Community

In alignment to the Department of Health policy and the HSE National Service plan 2016, health professionals within acute and community settings can have an impact by;

[Community Games](#) aims to provide opportunities for children and young people aged 6-16 years to develop active healthy lives in a safe environment through experiencing a wide range of sporting and cultural activities.

[Active School](#) is an initiative that encourages schools to achieve a physically educated and physically active school community by working towards the Active School Flag. 10% all schools in Ireland are now involved in the initiative.

[Get Ireland Active](#) supports Park Run - a total of 33 events take place across Ireland every week. Park Run encourages everyone from the novice walker/jogger to the finer tuned runner to get active.

The GAA – Healthy Clubs project support competitive sport in Ireland.

[Smart Start – FETAC Level 5](#) is a health promotion training module for pre-schools.

[The Healthy Workforce Challenge](#) aims to improve the health of the public sector workforce to reduce levels of sick leave and improve productivity. This approach is to be given a statutory footing in a new Bill that is being led by the Department of Education and Skills, the Health Services Executive and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (HSE, 2015).

Individual and family

The Irish Heart Foundation (www.Irishheartfoundation.ie) runs a number of initiatives to combat obesity.

The Irish Cancer Society (www.Irishcancersociety.ie) website contains information

on the link between obesity and cancer and contains 10 healthy weight tips to help people get control of their weight and eat healthily.

Diabetes Ireland (www.diabetes.ie) is able to provide fast access to dieticians for people who at risk of Type 2 diabetes, or who have been diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes and need help in understanding carbohydrates and portion size in maintaining overall management of their condition.

As part of clinical care and management, a new GP contract for children under 6 yrs old has been introduced that will provide free wellness checks for children at age two and five years, that are focused on health and wellbeing and disease prevention. A list of community and school programmes to promote healthy weight and activity can be found on www.hse.ie .

Other community-based programmes which can be signposted include: UP4IT (obesity prevention and care for children and parents); Counter Weight (an evidence-based weight loss programme); W82GO (a multidisciplinary healthy lifestyle programme).

[Level of physical activity increased \(Irish Sports Monitor Report 2011\)](#)

[Level of consumption of fruit and veg increased \(HSBC Ireland Trends Report\)](#)

The Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI) in the Republic of Ireland (HSE/DoH, 2014) showed that obesity and overweight in 7 year olds had decreased over a period of 8 years.

[Healthy Ireland - framework for improved health and wellbeing 2013 – 2025](#) (PDF, 1.5KB, 60 pages) An outcomes framework that will specify key indicators to underpin each of four high-level goals. Targets for quantifiable improvements will be set, where appropriate. Regular measurement of these indicators will allow progress to be assessed over time.

Measuring outcomes

The HSE national service plan proposes the following Key Performance Indicators for 2016;

Health & Wellbeing:

% of Newborn babies breastfed (exclusively and not exclusively) at first PHN visit = 56%

% of Newborn babies breastfed (exclusively and not exclusively) at 3mts PHN visit = 56%

Access to services:

Dietetics

☐ % on waiting list for treatment ≤ 52 weeks = 100%

☐ % on waiting list for treatment ≤ 12 weeks = 70%

Healthy eating Active living:

No of people who have completed a structured patient education programme for diabetes = 2,200 for 2016

Examples of good practice

Initiatives to support increased activity levels include:

- Park run www.parkrun.ie
- Ballymun men's centre www.ballymun.org/mens-centre/
- Irish Men's Sheds Association www.mensheds.ie

The [GIY Community Garden initiative](#) supports and promotes a community garden culture in Ireland that helps to regenerate marginalised urban and rural communities, improve public health and reduce the community's reliance on food imports.

[Healthy Food for All](#) is an all-island charity addressing food poverty by promoting access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups.

The ICGP has produced [E-learning for GPs](#) in relation to addressing childhood overweight and obesity.

A new [GP contract for children under 6 years old](#) has been introduced that will provide free wellness checks for children at age two and five years, that are focused on health and wellbeing and disease prevention.

Guidance

The Irish College of General Practitioners has produced [three treatment algorithms](#) for weight management:

- before, during and after pregnancy

- adults, and
- children

Guidance about supporting the development of healthy communities is set out in [Healthy Ireland – a framework for improved health and wellbeing 2013-2025](#) (PDF, 1.5KB, 60 pages)