



fighting heart disease  
and stroke

european heart network

5<sup>th</sup> June 2015

## **EHN response to the questions for consultation on the WHO Interim report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity**

### **1. Are there issues or strategies that have been overlooked in the Commission's interim report?**

The report touches upon the need for international standards, e.g. on food labelling (paragraph 36), but stops short of discussing the need for global regulatory measures on food and nutrition to promote public health, including addressing childhood obesity and non-communicable diseases. We believe that such measures (for example in the form of a Global Convention) are needed as it is increasingly difficult for countries and regions to introduce them unilaterally.

### **2. How can your sector/entity contribute to the proposed policy options to end childhood obesity?**

The European Heart Network contributes to tackling childhood obesity at several levels:

- Information to our members about research as well as policy developments relevant to addressing childhood obesity
- Coordination of responses to consultations
- Raising awareness with the European Commission and members of the European Parliament and advocating for effective EU-wide policies
- Reaching out to and engaging other civil society organisations
- Participating in EU platforms and networks
- Participating in WHO (Euro) stakeholder fora

Some of the most relevant EHN projects and publications in the field of reducing child obesity are mentioned below. More can be found on our website on [www.ehnheart.org](http://www.ehnheart.org).

- The publication “Children and young people – the importance of Physical Activity”<sup>1</sup> (December 2001) focuses on physical activity in young people and gives a set of recommendations on how to promote physical activity amongst children
- The project Children and Obesity and Associated Avoidable Chronic Disease (2004 till 2006). The aim of this project was to tackle the obesity epidemic among children and young people. The project had a specific focus on one of the environmental factors, namely marketing to children of foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt, as a short term action.
- Two publications were produced during this project which can be used as reference work in the framework of fighting child obesity
  - The marketing of unhealthy foods to children (published in 2005)<sup>2</sup>
  - “Policy options to prevent child obesity” (published in 2006)<sup>3</sup>
- EHN is a member of the EU platform on diet, physical activity and health, and delivered on a commitment to make an overview of its members’ activities in the field of physical activity.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2013, EHN finalised a commitment on Nutritional criteria for foods/drinks advertised to children<sup>5</sup>
- In a further Commitment to the EU platform on Diet, PA and health, EHN is now preparing an overview of what its members do in the field of Empowering and informing families on diet and physical activity. The overview will be available by the end of 2015.

### **3. What are the important enablers to consider when planning the implementation of these proposed policy options?**

- A solid economic case for addressing childhood obesity including cost-effectiveness of policy and intervention options
- Political will and leadership
- Structures within governing bodies at international, national and local level to support childhood obesity prevention policies and interventions that promote a health in all policies approach, whilst include a dedicated unit to lead and coordinate, and ensure accountability
- Dedicated funding for implementation, monitoring and evaluation

### **4. What are the potential barriers to implementation to be considered for these proposed policy options?**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ehnheart.org/publications/publications/publication/133-children-and-young-people-the-importance-of-physical-activity-.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ehnheart.org/projects/children-a-obesity/publication/54.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ehnheart.org/projects/children-a-obesity/publication/52.html>

<sup>4</sup> Heart Healthy Physical Activity Initiatives in Europe (2007 – 2008)

<sup>5</sup> Nutritional criteria for foods/drinks advertised to children (2012 – 2013):

<http://www.ehnheart.org/publications/publications/publication/705-ehn-research-on-nutrient-profile-model.html>

- Lack of political appetite for regulatory measures.
  - Specifically, in terms of marketing of HFSS products to children, measures to combat the excessive marketing of HFSS are predominantly self-regulatory, yet evidence strongly supports the view that self-regulation is not a suitable regulatory mechanism to protect children effectively from the harmful consequences that the marketing of HFSS food has on their health.
- Competing priorities (e.g. mathematics versus physical activity in school curricula)
- Conflicting interests (industry interests vs public health interests)
  - It is recommended that across the world, development of obesity and nutrition policy should be protected from food industry influence; ideally it should be a legally binding obligation for WHO and all governments

**5. How would your sector/entity measure success in the implementation of these proposed policy options?**

The below is a list of examples how we would measure success (not exhaustive):

- Establishment of EU wide regulation strictly limiting marketing of HFSS foods to children (e.g. via the revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive).
- Adoption of a global convention on food and nutrition to promote public health, including amongst other a standardised global food labelling system.
- An increased number of countries in which governments make use of taxes to reduce consumption of HFSS foods and non-alcoholic beverages.
- Inclusion in school curricula should of a statutory three-hour (lesson) minimum per week dedicated to physical education in schools across the EU for all ages of young people, all the year round. In countries with no existing statutory minimum, an initial aim should be for a statutory two-hour minimum per week. Schools should be encouraged to go beyond these minimum levels.

**6. How would your sector/entity contribute to a monitoring and accountability framework for these proposed policy options?**

In its contacts with the European decision makers, the European Heart Network stresses the importance of good monitoring and advocates for setting up a framework structures and tools which allow the collection of comparable data from e.g. the food industry, so that adequate monitoring of products and activities can be achieved.