

Response from the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh to the Health & Social Care Committee’s call for proposals on preventative healthcare.

The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (RCPE) is pleased to respond to the Committee’s call for proposals and welcomes its interest in preventative healthcare.

The RCPE has consistently argued that sustained, long-term investment in preventative health can help improve population health and reduce the demand for, and pressure on, acute health and community services and, consequently, some of the costs associated with those services. We need to move away from the NHS being primarily a reactive service that treats illness, a “National Illness Service”, to one where there is also a very significant pro-active focus on good health promotion. The fact that it has been estimated that 89% of deaths in the UK are caused by non-communicable diseasesⁱ illustrates the importance of urgent action regarding prevention.

Supporting and promoting preventative health measures plays a part in reducing health inequalities which we consider remains another urgent priority. We recently responded to the Health Foundation’s comprehensive new report into health inequalities in Scotland which identified the lack of progress being made in narrowing many of Scotland’s health inequalities.ⁱⁱ

We believe that there are a substantial number of issues that the Committee could usefully consider, including inequalities in vaccine uptake, but we would highlight in particular those below.

Diet, obesity and physical activity.

Reducing levels of obesity is one of the greatest challenges we face. Obesity is directly linked to a wide range of serious range of health conditions including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, liver and respiratory disease and cancer. Childhood obesity levels are especially concerning: the most recent data from the National Child Measurement Programme 2021 to 2022 showed that over 23% of children in Year 6 were living with obesity, with 5.8% of children living with severe obesity.ⁱⁱⁱ

The RCPE is aware that the UK government’s restrictions on promotions of foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS), which we support, will come into force this autumn. We also are aware that it is currently consulting on advertising restrictions on TV and online for HFSS products and we welcome these proposals.

However, we would recommend that the UK Government needs to look at further policy proposals designed to reduce obesity levels, including among children. It may be useful to look at examples of success internationally. A further review of how government can support the promotion of healthier foods and ensure they are affordable for all would be encouraged. The College is a founding member of the Scottish Obesity Alliance and also supports a holistic whole-system approach to tackling obesity, including the involvement of government departments covering planning, education, environment and transport as well as health. These are all important facets in health inequalities.

In terms of physical activity, in our manifesto^{iv} ahead of the Scottish Parliamentary elections in 2021 we put forward the proposal of trialling the introduction of free gym memberships for 16- to 24-year-olds in the most deprived parts of Scotland, to maintain and improve physical exercise for school leavers. It may be that the Committee

would like to consider this proposal or others around ensuring access to exercise, especially for people in the most deprived communities.

Alcohol

Problems associated with alcohol continue to be a major challenge for health services across the UK with the latest data indicating the number of alcohol-related hospital admissions is continuing to increase^v. The RCPE would urge that the UK Government consider additional and comprehensive measures to reduce alcohol-related harms.

We would commend to the Committee the work of Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP)^{vi}, based within our College, which puts forward evidence-based proposals and initiatives. SHAAP currently are campaigning on issues around the impact of alcohol industry sponsorship of sports and have published a report on alcohol sponsorship in football and how Scotland compares with other European nations^{vii}. The Committee may want to look at this as part of consideration of possible restrictions on alcohol promotion and advertising; a consultation on this subject is currently under way in Scotland.^{viii}

ⁱ [House of Lords - The Long-term Sustainability of the NHS and Adult Social Care - Select Committee on the Long-term Sustainability of the NHS \(parliament.uk\)](#)

ⁱⁱ [Health Foundation Report into Health Inequalities in Scotland | Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh \(rcpe.ac.uk\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [National Child Measurement Programme, England, Provisional 2021/22 School Year Outputs - NDRS \(digital.nhs.uk\)](#)

^{iv} [health priorities 2021 final 2 0.pdf \(rcpe.ac.uk\)](#)

^{vv} [Part 1: Alcohol-related hospital admissions - NDRS \(digital.nhs.uk\)](#)

^{vi} [SHAAP \[Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems\]](#)

^{vii} [Final report web.pdf \(shaap.org.uk\)](#)

^{viii} [Restricting alcohol advertising and promotion: consultation - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)