

Great Weight Debate

London's conversation on childhood obesity

Stage 1 Summary report



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01

Introduction and methodology

Introduction

What is the Great Weight Debate?

The Great Weight Debate is a conversation to fully engage and involve Londoners in the future health of their children, and galvanise wider social action and support to tackle childhood obesity.

The Great Weight Debate is designed to be a conversation that:

- ✓ includes **awareness raising, co-production of solutions** moving toward **generating wider social action**
- ✓ identifies **proposals on the wider environment and food choices** that could be supported and delivered through London's **devolution deal**
- ✓ **draws in a wide range of sectors in London** with the potential capability to contribute to and effect solutions

In Stage 1 roundtables, an online community and a citizens' panel style event have been completed and summarised in this report. In **Stage 2**, local boroughs are joining the conversation and engaging local residents in the debate. Stage 2 overlaps with **Stage 3** in the Autumn when more city-wide conversations will take place to revisit regional plans for action alongside the launch of the national strategy for childhood obesity. **Stage 4** will be the establishment of a shared change platform for ongoing pan-London participation, learning and action on childhood obesity.

Who is leading the conversation?

The Great Weight Debate is overseen by London's Prevention Board with expert input and steer provided by the London Obesity Leadership Group. The Healthy London Partnership (HLP) has established a central resource unit for the Great Weight Debate delivering this engagement in partnership with CCGs, local government, the GLA, NHS England and Public Health England. Local government will be leading borough based conversations around the capital. London has also elected a new Mayor who will be asked to support a number of key actions needed at a city-wide level.

Methodology Overview

- The objective for Stage 1 of the Great Weight Debate was to gauge public opinion and support to inform future responses and crowdsource public-led solutions to childhood obesity.
- Stage 1 began with a desktop review that included incorporating findings from engagement undertaken as part of the London Health Commission in 2014. A sequence of new engagement activities were then undertaken.
- During Stage 1, we commissioned an independent insight and strategy consultancy, BritainThinks, who designed and completed the engagement activities and we ensured London media were also approach to begin awareness raising.

Sequence of Activities

Desk top review of key policies, opinion and research to inform...

2 x focus groups with Londoners
10th February

3 x roundtables with professionals
30th and 31st March and 5th April

Online community with 120 Londoners
18th April – 1st May

The Great Weight Debate
Citizen Panel event
17th May

Participants

120 participants living in zones 1 – 7 were recruited to the online community

Participants were recruited using four qualitative recruiters based in North, East, South and West London as follows:

Sex: 48 male and 72 female

Age: 24 participants aged 18 – 29, 44 participants aged 30 – 44, 28 participants aged 45 – 59, 24 participants aged 60+

Social grade: 20 AB / 32 C1 / 32 C2 / 36 DE

Ethnicity: min. 68 BAME participants

Family status: min. 60 participants with children under 19 living at home and min. 24 participants with grandchildren under 19 who they see on a regular basis

All participants were UK taxpayers

5 participants were not comfortable engaging online, and were therefore provided with pen and paper versions of the online exercises

20 participants were unable to attend the Great Weight Debate event. 10 of these were replaced to the same demographic profile.

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Ideas for change

There is a need to raise awareness of the scale of the problem of childhood obesity

- Spontaneous awareness amongst Londoners of the extent and severity of this problem in London was limited
- However, information on the scale of the challenge was deeply shocking for Londoners, and led to demands change
- Londoners were clear that the first step in creating this change will be educating Londoners on the challenge through information provision
- Londoners felt it was important that this information is provided in a simple format, using facts and figures that all Londoners can understand and in a location (for example, public transport) where all Londoners can see it.
- They wanted information to strike a balance between shocking Londoners into realising the scale of the problem, and avoiding further stigmatising children who are overweight or obese
- Finally, Londoners agreed it will be important to frame the problem in environmental and social terms to avoid this issue being dismissed as being about personal responsibility and / or poor parenting

“I knew obesity is a major problem for London, but I didn’t anticipate the severity [of childhood obesity].”

“You need people to know about the issue – and make them realise they can solve it.”

“It’s really hard. How can we identify that obesity is a problem, without being negative?”

There is considerable appetite for direct and far-ranging interventions

- Given the scale and severity of the challenge facing London, both Londoners and professionals were willing to tolerate – and indeed called for – direct interventions by government at national, regional and local levels
- There was strong support for the involvement of the private sector in solutions to this problem both because the private sector was considered to have a moral responsibility to engage with and improve society and, on a practical level, be likely to be able to bring about considerable change
- In light of the seriousness of the issue London is facing, Londoners' over-riding concern when thinking about how best to tackle childhood obesity was the probable effectiveness of the range of ideas
 - How fair the idea is (i.e. is it likely to help all Londoners, including those in deprived areas?) was also an important consideration
 - Cost and ease of implementation, though recognised as factors, were deemed secondary

“There’s been nothing mentioned about supermarkets and the people that manufacture food. Where is their responsibility?”

“It’s amazing how receptive kids are to advertising. [Banning advertising of HFSS foods to children] could have a huge impact and would reinforce the culture change message that we want to promote.”

Many ideas were generated across Stage 1

- Healthy scores on the doors of food retailers to kitemark them for healthy menus and healthy portion sizes especially for kids
- Extend the healthy schools initiative into early years settings
- Every primary school in London to embed the 'Daily Mile' initiative at the start of the school day (1 mile or 15mins of exercise – walk, run, dance!)
- Make London a baby and breastfeeding-friendly city
- Proportion of public venue advertising space to be reserved for public health campaigns. E.g. TfL advertising budget to encourage more Londoners to walk 10,000 steps a day, and TfL should change signage to encourage people to walk-up stairs and escalators.
- Establish a CSR scheme for large corporations in London to invest in making London's communities and the city healthy and in addressing health inequalities.
- Begin the pedestrianisation of London's streets, allocating some London streets on weekends for pedestrian use only and to promote play streets.
- Ban adverts in public places for foods high in fat, salt and sugar - including banning sponsorship as a means to advertise these products to children.

From these, Londoners identified their top 5 ideas

1. Change the way fast food outlets operate (including working with business to produce healthy alternatives to existing options, limiting opening times and restricting the opening of new outlets)
2. Ban advertising HFSS foods to children
3. Keep a fixed proportion of TfL advertising space for public health messaging
4. Use TfL signage to encourage active travel (e.g. by advertising the amount of time it would take to walk to the next bus stop, and the number of calories that would be used)
5. Make London's green spaces safe and appealing for families (e.g. by providing a range of child-friendly activities, like green gyms)

"Curtail the number. If the local community said there can't be more than 50 chicken shops in the borough, if you have to get a bus to get to a chicken shop, you would think about it."

"More health advertising would promote the issues and is easy to do."

"This would take advantage of existing facilities to encourage people to have active lifestyles. It would make it normal."

"If it's a green gym, you could all go as a family and you don't have to worry about looking after the kids."

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Galvanising London

Transforming London's health and care together

Londoners identified 4 key criteria for any campaign to galvanise Londoners

1

A clearly identified leader, who assumes ultimate responsibility

- To ensure accountability, and a clear end goal
- Some felt that the Mayor would be best placed to assume this role, because of his high profile, influence and responsibility for Londoners

2

Incorporate learnings from previous behaviour change campaigns

- Including both successful and less successful ones, to maximise chances of success

3

Involve London's children

- Including harnessing “pester power” to amplify messages and encourage parents to change their habits
- This will mean that any campaign needs to be visually-driven and “cool”

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Focus on solutions

- Need to go beyond just raising awareness to showing and / or involving Londoners in practical steps to tackle the issue

Londoners were also clear that they should be engaged directly – and identified several ways to do this

1. Gamification

- There was strong support for using Londoners' competitive spirit to motivate them to demand change
- Participants suggested publishing and regularly updating national or international childhood obesity rankings so Londoners can see how they are doing relative to others
- And giving children Fitbits and setting up intra-school competitions (e.g. whose students take, on average, the greatest number of steps per day), with prizes for the top-ranking schools. Children could also track their school's progress on an app, to see how they are doing

2. Healthy living events

- Events themed around healthy living would both attract media attention and be an opportunity to bring Londoners together around a shared issue
- Suggestions included a free "Healthy Living Festival" held in a central location, e.g. Trafalgar Square, where low-cost, healthy food would be available, alongside information on the scale of the problem and advice on how to live healthily and recipe tips
- At a local level, they suggested cooking events focusing on the diverse foods available in local areas, and demonstrations showing how to prepare healthy versions of world foods

3. Online campaigns and petitions

- Numerous participants were aware of recent petitions that have received considerable media attention. This led them to suggest that a petition demanding action on childhood obesity should be created
- This could be supported by a hashtag that Londoners could use to share their thoughts on childhood obesity
- Together these would generate press attention and show policy makers that this issue is important to Londoners
- And would also be a tangible action that Londoners could easily take

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Next steps

Next steps

Many great ideas were put forward in Stage 1 of the Great Weight Debate which will continue throughout 2016/17. Over the coming months, the delivery unit for the Great Weight Debate within Healthy London Partnership will:

- Continue engagement with Stage 1 participants through a planned “Voice of Londoners” group, which will work with the London Prevention Board to steer the Great Weight Debate by ensuring that Londoners views are heard and responded to.
- Develop a hub of tools and resources for local boroughs and CCGs to use in order to support them in engaging their local communities as part of Stage 2
- Work closely with the London Mayor’s office and devolution team to identify London-wide opportunities for delivering policy or legislative changes.
- Continue to work closely with the London Obesity Leadership Group, sharing findings from the Great Weight Debate and reviewing borough sector-led improvement work to identify best practice that can be shared to enable London-wide learning and improvement.

Contact the Healthy Londoner Partnership to get involved:
<https://www.myhealth.london.nhs.uk/healthy-london-partnership>

Twitter: @HealthyLDN

Healthy London
Partnership



The Great Weight Debate...a London conversation on childhood obesity

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