



October 2006

Briefing 06/49

TO: ALL CHIEF EXECUTIVES, MAIN CONTACTS AND EMAIL CONTACTS (Scotland)

CC: ALL CHIEF EXECUTIVES, MAIN CONTACTS (England, Wales & Northern Ireland)

Overview of NHS Health Scotland's Review of the Scottish Diet Action Plan: Progress and Impacts 1996-2005

Key issues:

- 1. NHS Health Scotland has recently published their policy review of the Scottish Diet Action Plan**
- 2. While substantial progress has been made in some areas, dietary targets set for 2005 are overwhelmingly not being achieved**
- 3. A significant acceleration of policy initiatives is needed to promote greater intake of healthier food commodities**

1. Introduction

NHS Health Scotland has recently published their policy review of the Scottish Diet Action Plan: Progress and Impacts 1996-2005.

The purpose of the review was to examine progress with the implementation of the Scottish Diet Action Plan (SDAP) since 1996; to consider its impacts to date and identify strategic priorities for Scotland's future policy on improving the Scottish diet.

This briefing paper summarises the main findings and conclusions of the review which is available to download in full at: -

<http://www.healthscotland.com/understanding/evaluation/policy-reviews/review-diet-action.aspx>

2. Background

In July 1996, Eating for Health: A Diet Action Plan for Scotland, commonly known as the Scottish Diet Action Plan (SDAP), was published by the Scottish

Office. At this time, Scotland had a poor record of diet-related ill-health and the aim of the SDAP was to reduce diet related mortality and morbidity in Scotland, particularly related to diseases such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

In 2004, the Scottish Executive published an updated version of SDAP, Eating for Health - Meeting the Challenge, which outlined the co-ordinated action, improved communication and leadership needed to take forward the implementation of the plan. One of the agreed actions was to review the progress made to date towards achieving the targets set for 2005. An independent policy review was therefore commissioned in July 2005 by Health Scotland reporting to the Scottish Food and Health Council.

3. The Findings

Progress

The review, published last month, makes reference to the huge amount of work which has been undertaken in pursuit of the SDAP targets and highlights the areas where substantial progress has already been made. These include:-

- The appointment of a national Food and Health Co-ordinator within the Scottish Executive with appropriate responsibility to provide national level leadership to drive SDAP implementation and encourage cross-government working
- The creation of alliances on food and health (to increase policy leverage)
- The development of health promoting schools and a whole school approach to healthy eating, catering and supply (to improve dietary education and the provision of healthy food in schools)
- The provision of free fruit in schools (to intervene directly in children's diet)
- The setting of nutritional standards for school meals (to give a lead in public sector catering)
- The distribution of nutrition advice to every household in Scotland
- The development of health education campaigns and resources on healthy eating (to raise awareness about healthy eating messages and support health professionals)

The Association welcomes all of the above developments towards improving the long term health and well being of the people of Scotland. In particular, APSE recognises the good work that local authorities across Scotland have been doing in improving food and diet within their schools. It is APSE's firm belief that encouraging a healthier lifestyle by promoting good diet and nutrition in children is crucial in the fight against childhood obesity and other diet related conditions.

Importantly, the proposed Schools (Nutrition and Health Promotion) (Scotland) Bill will further strengthen local authorities role in public health by placing them under a duty to ensure that food and drinks which they provide

in their schools meet defined nutrient standards, which go beyond those currently in place through Hungry for Success.

Targets Not Being Met

Despite the considerable progress made with implementing the SDAP recommendations, these actions have not in themselves made a significant impact on population trends in food consumption and nutrient intakes in Scotland over the last ten years. Analysis within the review shows that the dietary targets set for 2005 are overwhelmingly not being achieved: -

There has been no change in: -

- Daily consumption of fruit and vegetables - average intakes remain at around 246 grams a day whereas the target was to achieve a minimum of 400 grams per person per day; however, the amount of fruit and fruit juice consumed has increased across all types of fruit but particularly bananas
- Saturated fatty acids - average intakes have fallen from about 15.6% to 15.2% of food energy, whereas the target was to reduce this to no more than 11% of food energy
- Total complex carbohydrates - the target was to increase intake by 25% but intake has remained at around 141g per person per week
- Weekly consumption of oil-rich fish - the target was to double consumption from 44 grams per person per week, but consumption has remained at around 34g
- Consumption of breakfast cereals - the target was to double consumption from 18g per person per day, but the consumption levels have remain unchanged.

Of greatest concern are those areas where the trends are moving in the wrong direction: -

- Intakes of non-milk extrinsic (NME) sugars (those implicated in tooth decay) have risen rather than being held constant (target for adults) or being reduced (target for children)
- Potato consumption has fallen by 25% instead of increasing by 25%
- Bread consumption has fallen by 12% instead of increasing by 45%, with the consumption of brown/wholemeal bread falling by 25%

The review considers a number of possible explanations as to why this might be the case: -

- The direction required to achieve the level of change defined by the dietary targets underestimated the impact of inequalities; resources and initiatives were spread too thinly across a broad range of actions rather than focusing on achieving population level impact within a few priority areas
- The broad range of actions recommended were not transparently or consistently linked to the narrow range of food and nutrient targets identified
- The SDAP adopted a wholly consensual, partnership approach to 'working with' the food industry and thus underplayed the powerful role

of the food supply chain in shaping food content, access, availability and consumer demand over the last ten years, such as the period of rapid restructuring of the food industry or the undermining of health messages by powerful marketing and advertising of foods and drinks. The SDAP did not deploy the full set of policy tools available, most notably exercising the regulatory and legislative powers of government to control the food supply chain and help create demand

- The areas where little or no progress was made with implementation suggest that, until the recent public debate about rapidly rising obesity, the food supply chain has not been fully engaged with the need to change; institutions and leadership across the supply chain were not aligned effectively
- At regional level, SDAP implementation and prioritisation appeared uneven, accountability for local implementation has been unclear and linkages with other relevant policy strands were inadequate

Each of the above reasons provide plausible explanations as to why the overall changes sought by the Scottish Diet Action Plan have not been achieved. There is however, no single reason for SDAP targets not being met. While some advances in thinking and practice have been made and some initiatives have been very effective, the total shift required has not yet been realised according to NHS Health Scotland. Furthermore, the review states that it is unlikely that substantial positive changes will be seen in the next 5 years without significant acceleration of policy initiatives to promote greater intake of healthier food commodities. The review goes on to highlight some important lessons for future policy: -

- To achieve population level impact a more focused and prioritised approach to policy and implementation may prove more effective than a broad range, or 'scattergun', of initiatives
- Given the complexity of modern food systems and their dynamics, action needs to be co-ordinated across all levels of food governance, from local to international
- The actions need to be more plausibly linked to policy outcomes and targets and founded upon the over-arching strategic themes or 'directions of travel' with which all stakeholders (state, supply chain and consumers) can engage
- Lines of accountability, monitoring and performance reporting on policy implementation needs to be improved using a wider range of shared intermediate outcomes to help evaluate progress towards targets across sectors
- Greater use of regulatory powers and incentives can be appropriate and set goals for the food supply chain as well as help build consumer demand

4. Conclusions

The Association for Public Service Excellence welcomes the progress that has been made so far in pursuit of the Scottish Diet Action Plan targets, but at the same time appreciates that a lot more still needs to be done.

In particular, APSE looks forward to the ongoing development of the School Meals service in Scotland with the proposed Schools (Nutrition and Health Promotion) (Scotland) Bill.

The review suggests a significant acceleration of policy initiatives is fundamental to ensuring positive changes within the next five years, and the Association would welcome the opportunity to be further involved in future policy discussion.

Food and nutrition are not the only factors involved in improving the health of our nation and recognising this, APSE are hosting a Health Improvement Consultation meeting with the Scottish Executive during the annual APSE Healthy Communities = Healthy Scotland Seminar which is being held on 9-10 November 2006 at Peebles Hydro Hotel.

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