



A framework document to facilitate healthy weight for children aged 0-6 years in Ireland

Dr. Fionnuala Cooney
Specialist in Public Health Medicine, HSE-East,
Dr Steevens' Hospital,
Dublin 8

on behalf of the Healthy Weight for Children Group

Early Intervention for Life
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The obesity problem and the obesogenic environment

- Obesity is an international problem with the worldwide prevalence nearly tripling between 1975 – 2016.
- Childhood obesity has recently emerged as a very serious and costly problem which is associated with increased risk of adverse health outcomes throughout life, including intergenerational effects.
- Obesity mainly stems from the unprecedented changes in human behaviours arising from recent technological advances.
- New approaches in prevention are needed that are focused on facilitating healthy behaviours throughout the population and throughout life.
- There are multiple opportunities for effective interventions to support healthy behaviours across all of the sectors.
- Of particular relevance to the 0-6 age group are the health, early years and education sectors.



Prevalence of problematic weight among young children in Ireland

Among 3 year olds: 24% are overweight or obese
(approx 16,338 three-year-olds)

Among 5 year olds: 20% are overweight or obese
(approx 14,481 five-year-olds)

Gender differences: 23% girls vs 18% boys

Among 7 year olds

A social gradient is apparent:

24% in lowest income quintile affected compared to
17% in highest quintile

The problem in primary schools

Prevalence of overweight and obesity is
6%-7% higher in schools in disadvantaged areas

The problem among pregnant women

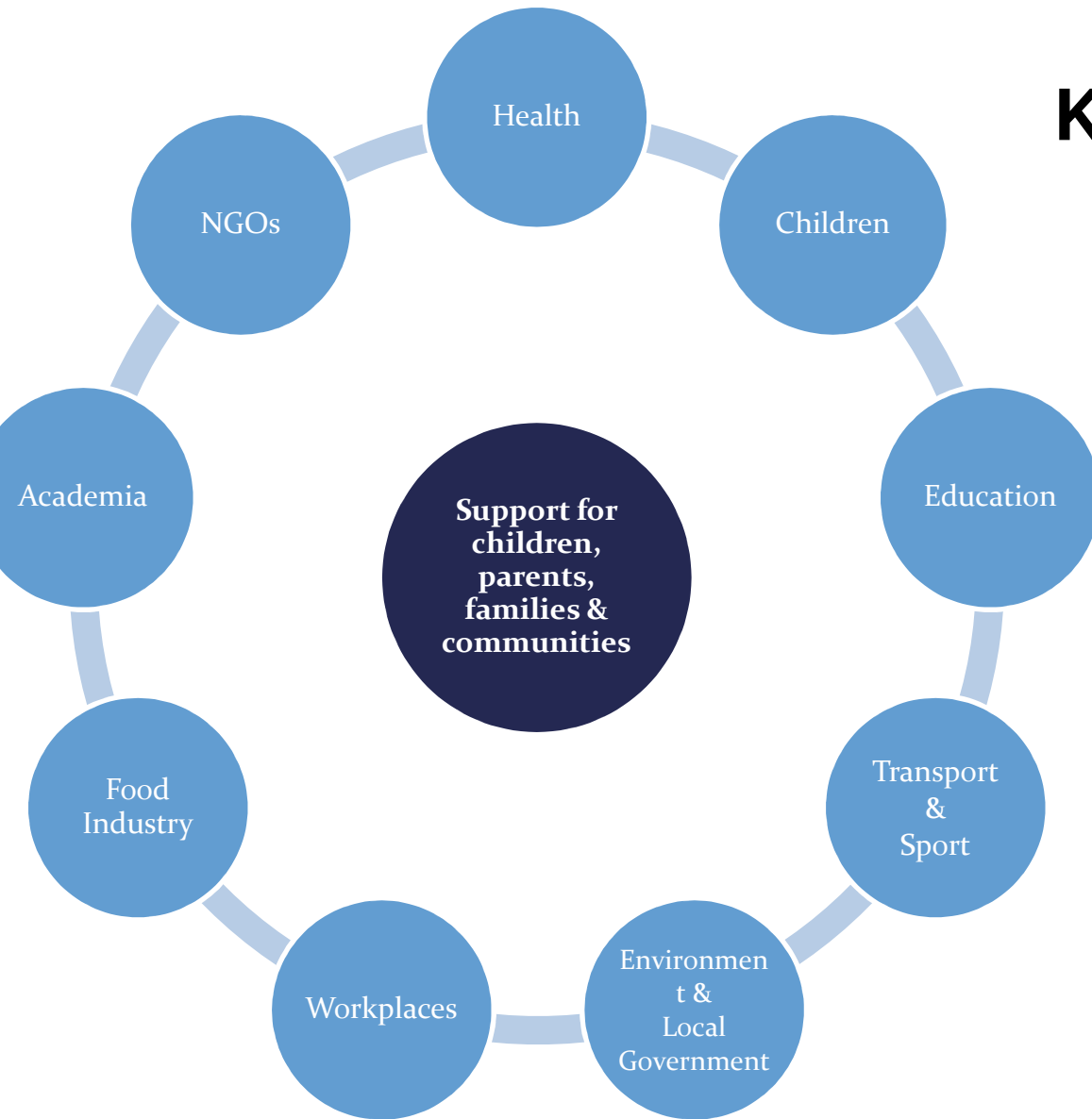
1 in 2 are overweight or obese at booking visit



National targets include:

- 0.5% per annum reduction in excess weight in children
- 10% closing of the gap between socio-economic groups





Sectors with leadership roles in the prevention of childhood obesity

Key enablers:



TÚS LA

An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency



The *safefood*-HSE partnership social marketing campaign

Using the *Healthy Ireland* approach and building upon existing services and structures

- The HWfC 0-6 framework guides action for healthy weight in children aged 0- 6 years and is inclusive of the pre-conception and the antenatal periods.
- The framework has a focus on prevention and is underpinned by national and international policy, current scientific evidence as well as working knowledge of the services in the relevant sectors in Ireland.
- A pragmatic approach has been used with recommendations developed specifically to build upon existing structures and resources, grouped into areas for action for implementation across the various levels, sectors and services.
- Leadership, governance, monitoring and evaluation are crucial for successful implementation.





Action area 2: Critical points for intervention during the life-course of children aged 0-6 years

Important roles for the health, early years and education sectors.

Preconception and pregnancy

- Preconception.
- Antenatal care.

Infancy

- Care at birth, whether hospital or home.
- The infant coming home for the first time.
- Baby feeding practices (breastfeeding or bottle feeding).
- Weaning (age at introduction to solids and type of food given).

Early childhood

- When the primary caregiver returns to work
- Attending preschool.
- Commencing primary school.

The aim is to facilitate change such that:

- breastfeeding is the norm
- responsive feeding from early infancy

And all children have:

- limited intake of foods high in fat, salt and sugar
- water and milk as routine drinks
- child-sized portion
- healthier food choices with more vegetables, salad and fruit
- regular physical activity
- limited screen time
- age appropriate sleep time

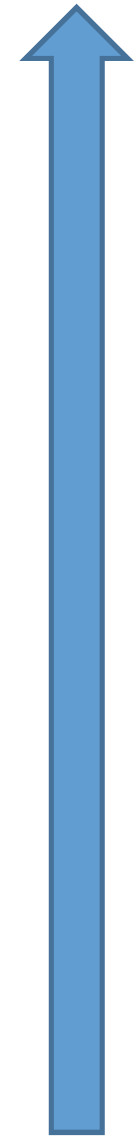


The National Healthy Childhood Programme

In this universal programme there are 25 scheduled contacts

The programme is available to all expectant mothers and all children

	24 - 36 months	GP	
	21 - 24 months	PHN	CMD
	13 months	GP	
	12 months	GP	
	9 - 11 months	PHN	CMD
	6 months	GP	
	4 months	GP	
	3 month	PHN	CMD
	2 months	GP	
	6 weeks	GP	
	2 weeks	GP	
	<1 week	PHN	
	Birth	H ⁺	
	Antenatal	H*6	GP*6



Positive parenting
 Parents as partners
 Focus on healthy behaviours rather than focus on weight
 Nurture programme
 Making Every Contact Count (MECC)

GP Periodic Assessments: focused on health and wellbeing and the prevention of disease

- scheduled at 2 years and at 5 years
- include weight and height measurements



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
 Health Service Executive

GP General Practitioner; PHN= Public Health Nurse; CMD = Community Medical Doctor

Population reach and levels of intensity in prevention and treatment of childhood obesity: three levels

- **Level 1** broad-based messages for healthy behaviours that are available to the whole population

Examples: the ***National Healthy Childhood Programme*** and the ***safefood/HSE social marketing campaigns*** which provide key messages and education in relation to healthy environments, behaviours and parenting.

- **Level 2** additional support for those who require it through the provision of skill building in addition to education.

Examples include ***Community Mothers Programme, Cook it, Healthy Meals Made Easy, Hassle Free Mealtimes***: programmes which develop parenting skills, cooking, physical activity etc and use motivational interviewing or counselling in addition to providing information.

- **Level 3** intensive support for high risk populations

Examples include ***Preparing for Life***, targeted at lower socio-economic groups and ***Weigh2Go*** clinical interventions.



The importance of monitoring and evaluation: population profiling, intervention review and co-ordination of activities

- Monitoring and evaluation of:
 - Children's growth and behaviours including nutrition and physical activity.
 - Interventions at all levels including the policy and legislative initiatives, interventions in the relevant sectors, community-based interventions etc.
- Leadership, governance, monitoring and evaluation are crucial for successful implementation
 - *Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group*, under governance of Department of Health
 - *Children and Young People Service Development Committees*, established by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to improve services and health outcomes for children, under its policy commitment for *Better Future Brighter Outcomes*
- In addition, the following are recommended to facilitate best practice and efficient working across the sectors:
 - An expert advisory group to advise on interventions for the prevention of obesity in children
 - A dedicated resource for collaboration and consistency in the delivery of interventions across the sectors.



Thank You

The multidisciplinary *Healthy Weight for Children (HWfC)* Working Group was convened in 2016 by HSE and includes representatives from healthcare services, safefood, Tusla (Child and Family Agency) and academia :

Dr. Phil Jennings, National Lead – Healthy Childhood Programme (Chair), Director of Public Health, HSE-Midlands

Dr. Fionnuala Cooney, Specialist in Public Health Medicine Department of Public Health, HSE-East

Ms. Mary Hegarty – Senior Researcher Department of Public Health, HSE-Midlands

Ms Laura Smith, Information Officer –Department of Public Health Public Health, HSE-Midlands

Ms. Sarah O’Brien, National Lead, Healthy Eating and Active Living Programme, HSE

Ms. Celine Croarkin- Project Management Support, Healthy Eating and Active Living Programme , HSE

Ms. Eileen Maguire, Training and Development Officer, HSE

Ms. Anne McAteer, Health Promotion & Improvement, HSE

Ms. Cara Cunningham, Senior Community Dietician, HSE

Dr. Kathleen O’Sullivan, Principle Medical Officer, HSE

Ms. Eilish Whelan, Acting Director Public Health Nursing, HSE

Dr. Sinead Murphy, Consultant Paediatrician, Children’s University Hospital, Temple Street

Dr. Cliodhna Foley Nolan, Safefood

Ms. Claire McNamara, Senior Community Development Officer, Tusla Child and Family Agency

Ms. Marita Hennessy, PhD Student and SPHeRE Scholar, School of Psychology, NUI Galway

