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Findings from Cameron's Long Delayed Childhood Obesity Strategy Are Billed as 'Pathetic' by Action on Sugar

According to a leaked copy of David Cameron's long overdue Childhood Obesity Strategy which, by all accounts is now being shelved until the autumn, Action on Sugar is now calling on the new Prime Minister, Theresa May to speedily and rapidly revise what should have been one of the UK's most important public health programmes.

Key findings from the leaked Plan include:

Reformulation

Public Health England (PHE) and Action on Sugar have both shown clearly that reformulation of both sugar and fat is by far the most effective way of reducing calorie intake in the whole population. Action on Sugar has asked for a 50% reduction in sugar and a 20% reduction in fat as it is easier and more effective to reduce fat as it contains x2.5 more calories compared to sugar.

In spite of this compelling evidence, the **draft plan only requires a 20% reduction by 2020** with no further plans for further reformulation and no mention extraordinarily of reformulation of sugar sweetened soft drinks – the main source of sugar in adolescents and children. The system is entirely voluntary in spite of the fact that the British Retail Consortium and the majority of supermarkets and many branded companies have asked for a mandated or regulated system. This has been shown internationally for salt reduction to be far more effective in reducing salt than voluntary systems which tend to be eroded by the food industry.

We also know from our experience with salt reduction that a 20% reformulation of sugar by 2020 will only result in approximately a 10% reduction given that it is a voluntary system and supervised by PHE, an agency which has already shown itself to not be independent of government and ministerial influence.

Soft drink levy / tax

Whilst the plan states there will be a soft drink levy, this still has to go through parliament, and in the current environment following Brexit the chances of it being made into law have now been significantly reduced. Furthermore, the tax would need to be escalated in order to have a major effect on sugar consumption in children from sugar-sweetened soft drinks.

Advertising, marketing and promotion

Restricting advertising, marketing and promotion is the other important evidence based way of reducing calorie intake, particularly in children who are targeted by the food industry both directly and through their parents. Extraordinarily, there are **no specifics about any marketing restrictions** and merely says there will be a consultation which is a pathetic response given the billions of pounds the food industry spends on advertising to young children of unhealthy products. There are many parallels between the restrictions on advertising cigarettes and unhealthy food, particularly as unhealthy food is now a much bigger cause of death than tobacco both worldwide and in the UK. The food industry could easily advertise and sell healthy food and still make money from this.

The remainder of the Plan addresses healthy school eating, government institutions, better labeling and advice on how to eat healthy – none of which have been shown to have any effect on calorie intake.

Action on Sugar estimates that the Plan in its current form will only reduce calorie intake by around 10-20Kcal/person/day as a maximum and this is nowhere near enough to have any real effect on preventing obesity.

Very disappointingly there is only a general sentence that salt reduction will be reviewed. The UK salt reduction programme has now been on hold for over a year in spite of the fact that the evidence from the UK has shown that this is the single most cost-effective public health policy already saving the NHS £1.5bn per year, according to NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence).

Professor Graham MacGregor, Chairman of Action on Sugar and Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH) and Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at Queen Mary University says:

"After the farce of the Responsibility Deal where Andrew Lansley made the food industry responsible for policing themselves, it is sad to see that this is just another imitation of the same Responsibility Deal take two. It is an insulting response to the UK crisis in obesity type 2 diabetes both in children and adults. This will bankrupt the NHS unless something radical is

done.

We urge Theresa May to revert back with an evidence based robust policy to prevent childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes. This would also be a major opportunity for her to demonstrate that she is being real in trying to help people who are less well off, particularly the socially deprived. Furthermore it is a huge opportunity following Brexit for the British food industry which has led the world in reducing salt to also lead the world in preventing obesity and type 2 diabetes."

Ends

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