



Obesity Health Alliance Secretariat
Wells Lawrence House
126 Back Church Lane
London
E1 1FH

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Prime Minister
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

15th June 2023

Dear Prime Minister,

We are deeply concerned by reports that the Government will delay the incoming multi-buy price promotions restrictions in England, designed to limit excessive purchasing of unhealthy food. We urge you to follow the evidence and allow it to come into force in October 2023 as planned^[i].

Last week, you made a bold and important commitment to cutting NHS waiting lists by reducing obesity - in 2019/2020, there were over one million NHS admissions in England where excess weight was a factor. As you rightly state, the NHS spends £6.5 billion annually on diet-related ill-health, piling pressure on the NHS, driving down economic productivity and forcing thousands of people out of the workforce^[ii].

Just yesterday, Health Minister Neil O'Brien MP stated your government was '*determined to halve childhood obesity by 2030*'^[iii]. The multi-buy price promotions policy is a key part of the Government's evidence-based childhood obesity strategy, designed to work with existing locations promotions and the delayed advertising restrictions, to cumulatively reduce excess calories in the diet. It is vital if we are to meet your target. It has already been delayed by a year, a move criticised at the time by your Chancellor as '*the wrong thing to do*'^[iv].

Multi-buy price promotions do not save people money. The government's own data shows they can increase food and drink purchasing by around 22%^[v]. They encourage people to impulsively buy more unhealthy food, rather than make savings from food already on their shopping list. This puts extra pressure on families with tight food budgets, not less. Instead, this policy will encourage price promotions on healthier food, to help protect the budgets of poorer families and put healthy dinners back on the table.

Two thirds of adults are living with overweight or obesity^[vi]. More than one in three children are above a healthy weight by the time they leave primary school, in deprived communities,

childhood obesity rates are over twice as high as in the most affluent areas^(vi). Unhealthy food has been made so widely available that it is almost unavoidable. It is heavily promoted and significantly more affordable than healthier options.

Two of the UK's largest retailers, Tesco and Sainsbury's, have committed to drop BOGOFs. This legislation is designed to create a level playing field on healthier business across the sector, shift promotions onto healthier products, and incentivise manufacturers to adopt healthier recipes. Your government's impact assessment for restricting volume promotions for high fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS) products states that *"expected direct benefits are equivalent to £2,390m over the 25-year assessment period. Social care benefits would amount to £212m, NHS cost savings of £180m and reduced premature mortality would be expected to deliver an additional £283m of economic output"*.

Unless bold preventive steps are taken, excess weight will continue to drive unacceptable inequalities in health outcomes. As a group of leading health charities, campaign groups and medical Royal Colleges, the Obesity Health Alliance urges you to bring in the price promotions restrictions as planned.

Yours sincerely

Katharine Jenner, Director, Obesity Health Alliance

On behalf of the Steering Group

QUOTES FROM ALLIANCE:

John Maingay, director of policy at the British Heart Foundation said:

"If true, this would be a dismaying move that will not help struggling families save money. Instead, multi-buy deals actually lead to people spending more money and eating more junk food, when we know they really want help to access healthier options. The Government has said itself in recent weeks how important it is to drive down our high obesity rates – but it won't achieve this unless it follows its own evidence and implements its own policies.

"There is no time to delay when it comes to addressing our obesity crisis, which costs our health service billions every year, and causes serious illness such as heart attacks and stroke. The Government must press ahead with restricting multi-buy deals, alongside the range of other measures needed to create a healthier environment for everyone."

Cancer Research UK's chief executive, Michelle Mitchell, said:

"It's disappointing to hear that once again the UK Government might retreat from implementing legislation passed to help make a healthy diet more accessible, affordable and appealing for all. When obesity causes 13 different types of cancer, we need to see bold action.

"Our research shows that people intend to make healthier choices when they shop, but they struggle to do so in practice. There is strong evidence that restricting multi-buy offers on unhealthy foods can shift away from this and make a positive contribution towards people's health and wallets.

“We urge the UK Government to press forward and commit to a strategy that will tackle rising obesity and reduce pressures on the NHS.”

Ben Reynolds, Deputy CEO of food and farming alliance Sustain, said:

“These restrictions provide a level playing field for businesses to shift promotions to healthier products, helping not hindering consumers in these difficult times. The Prime Minister needs to stand firm on his ambitions to halve child obesity by 2030 and not cave-in to a small group of ideological backbenchers and vested interests.”

Professor David Strain, BMA Board of Science Chair

“As doctors who witness first-hand the devastating impact that obesity has on the population’s health, both young and old, it is incredibly disappointing that the Government has further delayed this important policy.

“The Government’s own evidence-based obesity strategy recognises the importance of curbing unhealthy food promotions so delaying this is knowingly placing the profits of junk food companies ahead of the health of the population.

“Failure to implement more preventative policies also risks worsening the health inequalities association with obesity, with children living in more deprived areas being twice as likely to be obese. The Government has a responsibility to bring in this price promotion restrictions as planned in October 2023 as it is wholly irresponsible to not intervene to help protect the future health of population as the obesity crisis continues to spiral out of control.”

About us:

The Obesity Health Alliance is a coalition of over 50 leading health charities, campaign groups and medical royal colleges, calling for the Government to prioritise addressing the high levels of overweight and obesity in the UK population.

^[i] BOGOF deals face axe. Telegraph 13.06.2023

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/06/12/bogof-deals-face-axe/>

^[ii] Frontier Economics (2022) [Estimating the Full Cost of Obesity](#) [accessed 17th May 2023]

^[iii] NHS to double specialist clinics for severely obese children. The Times 14th June 2023. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/afabf564-0a0f-11ee-947c-69265173b330?shareToken=75fdc3ecc000356e1c7a70c6e2eafd45>

^[iv] Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt interview with Iain Dale on LBC on 19 May 2022 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KB4aXOQ5_w

^[vi] DHSC - Restricting promotions of products high in fat, sugar and salt by location and by price: government response to public consultation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/restricting-promotions-of-food-and-drink-that-is-high-in-fat-sugar-and-salt/outcome/restricting-promotions-of-products-high-in-fat-sugar-and-salt-by-location-and-by-price-government-response-to-public-consultation>

^[vii] NHS Digital, [Health Survey for England 2021](#) [accessed 14th June 2023]

^[viii] Gov. uk [Obesity Profile: statistical commentary](#) December 2022 [accessed 14th June 2023]

^[ix] Restricting volume promotions for high fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS)

products https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1003921/impact-assessment-for-restricting-volume-promotions-for-HFSS-products.pdf [accessed 14th June 2023]
