



**Obesity Action
Scotland**

Healthy weight for all

Supporting healthy weight in Scotland's children

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Marissa Smith – University of Glasgow

29th May 2024

Today we'll cover...

- ➔ Quick intro
- ➔ Our campaign on child healthy weight
- ➔ What does the data tell us?
- ➔ Policy landscape in Scotland
- ➔ Youth advocacy project and small group discussion
- ➔ Final thoughts and finish

WHERE?

WHAT?

WHO?

HOW?

WHY?

WHEN?



Our website



www.obesityactionscotland.org

@obesityactionscot

Note on language



- Weight stigma a significant barrier to support and development of solutions
- Really important to ensure the way we talk about weight is not stigmatising
- Person-first language (e.g. ‘people living with/who have obesity’) now viewed as correct term

The Pledge Campaign: Child healthy weight matters to me



Obesity Action
Scotland

Healthy weight for all



Pledge campaign

Purpose

To raise awareness of the low levels of child healthy weight in Scotland and the Government's ambition to halve childhood obesity by 2030

Key Outcome

To demonstrate strong stakeholder support for government action

Target Audience

All organisations and professionals invested in children's wellbeing in Scotland, including MSPs



Pledge campaign

Engagement...



Alcohol Focus Scotland @AlcoholFocus · Nov 10
The Pledge campaign is aiming to raise awareness of this inaction & highlight demand for change from the many groups invested in children's health 🗣️

To find out how you can get involved & show your support, visit @obesityactionsc's campaign page 📄
bit.ly/46vDwNj

You reposted
Collette Stevenson MSP @CStevensonSNP · Nov 14
🗣️ **Child Healthy Weight #MattersToMe !**

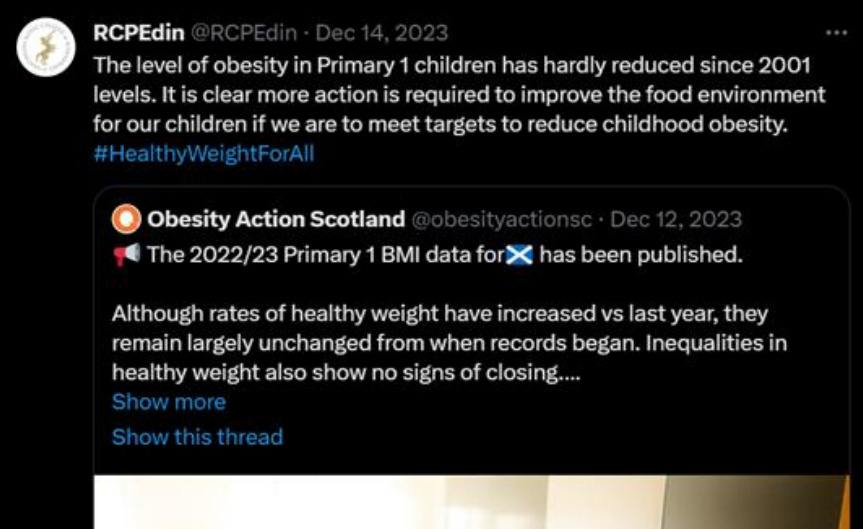
Urgent action is needed if Scot Gov is to be successful in its ambition of halving childhood obesity by 2030 🕒

Show your support!



Child healthy weight matters to me

#HealthyWeightForAll



RCPEdin @RCPEdin · Dec 14, 2023
The level of obesity in Primary 1 children has hardly reduced since 2001 levels. It is clear more action is required to improve the food environment for our children if we are to meet targets to reduce childhood obesity. #HealthyWeightForAll

Obesity Action Scotland @obesityactionsc · Dec 12, 2023
📢 The 2022/23 Primary 1 BMI data for 🇪🇺 has been published.

Although rates of healthy weight have increased vs last year, they remain largely unchanged from when records began. Inequalities in healthy weight also show no signs of closing....
[Show more](#)
[Show this thread](#)

Pledge campaign

Joint letter to Scottish Government

- Over 30 MSPs supported campaign
- 26 leading stakeholders signed

Available on our website



Jenni Minto MSP and Natalie Don MSP
The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

Child healthy weight matters – we need bold and urgent action to deliver healthy weight for all children in Scotland.

Dear Ministers,

We are writing to you regarding our significant concerns over a lack of policy action to deliver healthy diet and weight outcomes for children in Scotland.

Last year marked the fifth anniversary of the Scottish Government's ambition to halve the rate of childhood obesity in Scotland by 2030. However, the past five years have seen the health of Scotland's children move in a concerning direction. The latest statistics from the Scottish Health Survey show that one in every three children are at risk of developing overweight and obesity - the highest levels recorded since 2011. During the peak pandemic years, we saw a record proportion of children starting primary school at risk of developing obesity (16%), and the latest figures show that rates are still in a worse position than before the pandemic took effect. These developments are also underpinned by persistent inequalities in children's weight outcomes, which are determined by the level of deprivation they face when growing up.

Behind all of the statistics are children and young people who face worsening short and long-term health problems due to their weight. Issues associated with overweight and obesity in childhood are both physical and mental, but most importantly can contribute to cutting a life short. We see this as unacceptable in a country such as Scotland with the knowledge that this is preventable and the resources available which would enable us to change direction.

It is now time to take bold and urgent action. We urge the Scottish Government to champion measures that will protect children in Scotland and their long-term futures. The evidence-based actions outlined in the 2018 *Diet and Healthy Weight Delivery Plan* are promising, and they would go a long way in helping improve the situation for thousands of children and young people. Commitments in the delivery plan include:

- Regulating retail promotions of high fat, sugar, and salt products. It is vital this upcoming intervention is robust and free from industry influence in order to create the desired effect on children's health. We cannot afford to pass a policy that undermines its primary goal.
- Developing a code of practice for the restriction of unhealthy food and drink advertising outdoors. There has been no evidence that this measure has progressed.
- Developing and implementing an Out of Home strategy to ensure the sector is healthier for customers. Despite the *Eating Out, Eating Well* framework currently being piloted, the slow progress and voluntary nature of the strategy means it will not achieve the immediate improvement that our children's health requires.

To date there has been limited progress with each of these policies as well as the wider strategy.

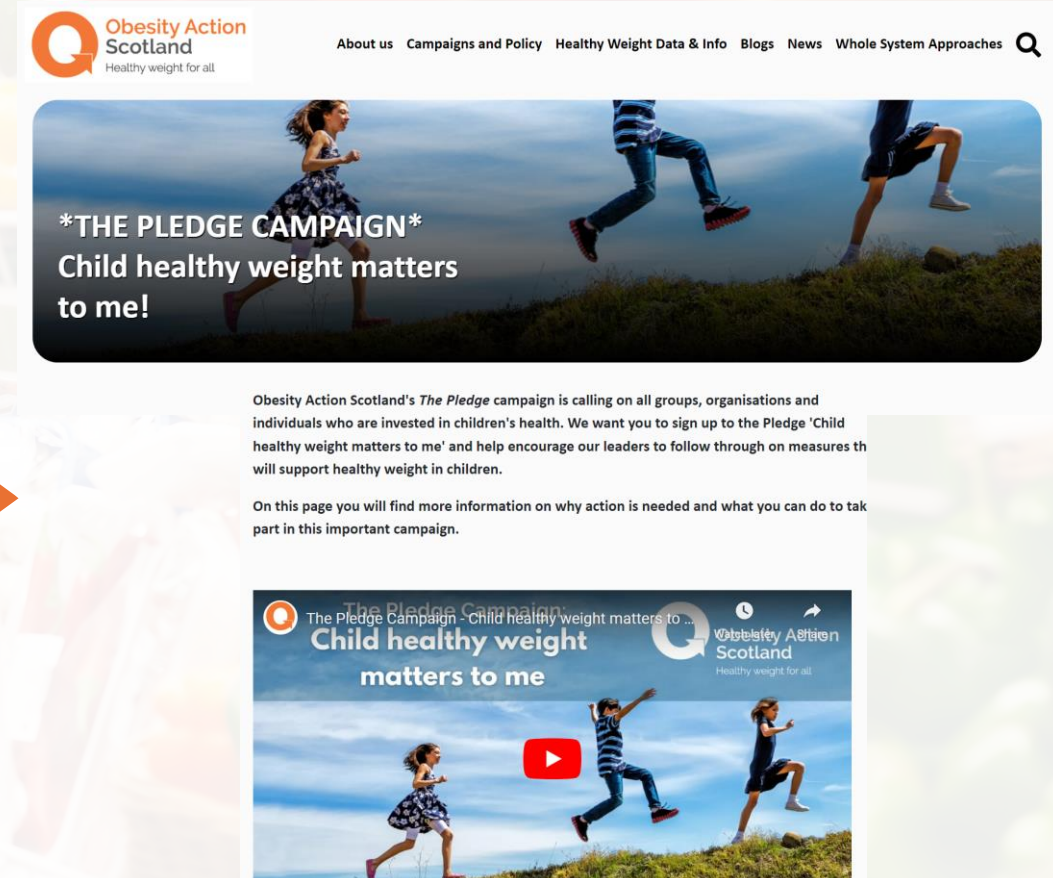


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Pledge campaign

We're not finished...(!)

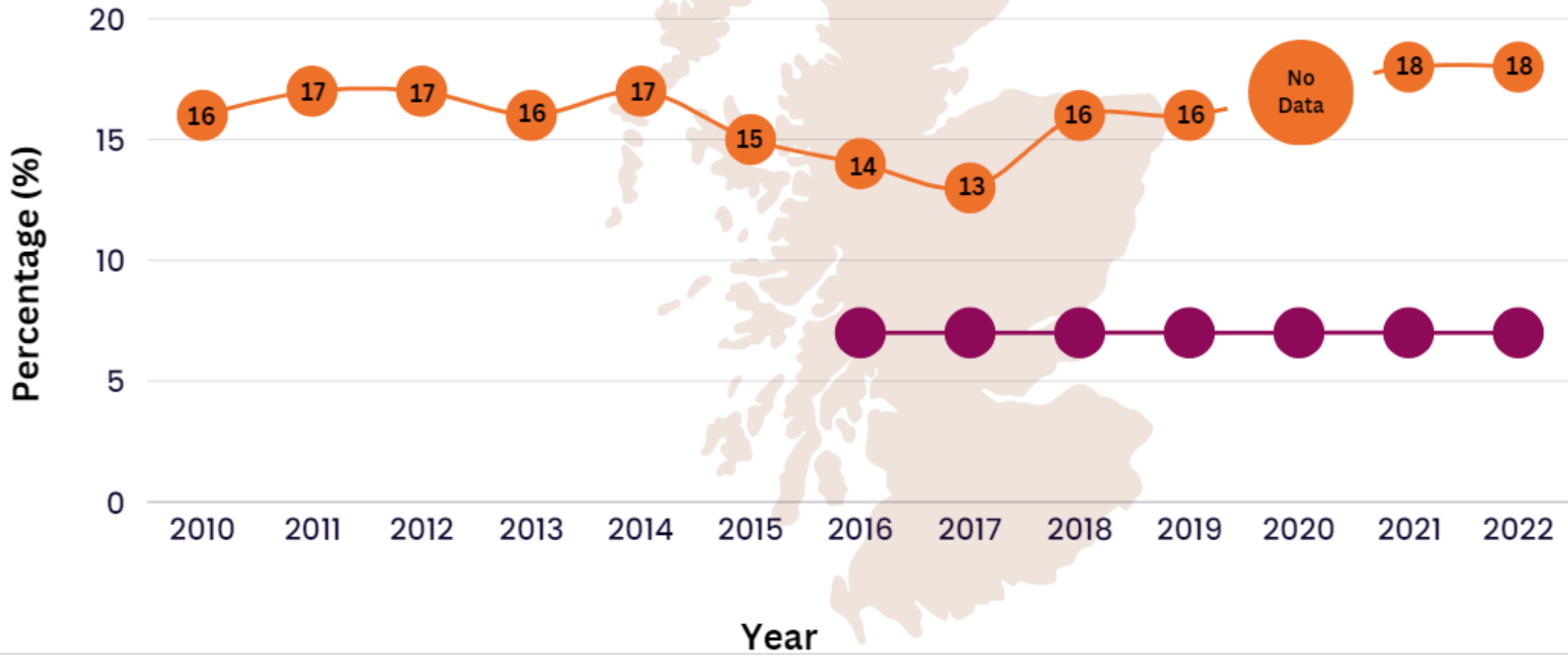


The screenshot shows the Obesity Action Scotland website. At the top left is the logo and tagline 'Healthy weight for all'. To the right is a navigation menu with links for 'About us', 'Campaigns and Policy', 'Healthy Weight Data & Info', 'Blogs', 'News', and 'Whole System Approaches'. Below the navigation is a hero banner with a background image of children running on a grassy hill. The banner text reads: '*THE PLEDGE CAMPAIGN* Child healthy weight matters to me!'. Below the banner is a paragraph of text: 'Obesity Action Scotland's *The Pledge* campaign is calling on all groups, organisations and individuals who are invested in children's health. We want you to sign up to the Pledge 'Child healthy weight matters to me' and help encourage our leaders to follow through on measures that will support healthy weight in children.' Below this is another paragraph: 'On this page you will find more information on why action is needed and what you can do to take part in this important campaign.' At the bottom of the screenshot is a video player with a red play button icon. The video player has a title 'The Pledge Campaign - Child healthy weight matters to me' and the Obesity Action Scotland logo.



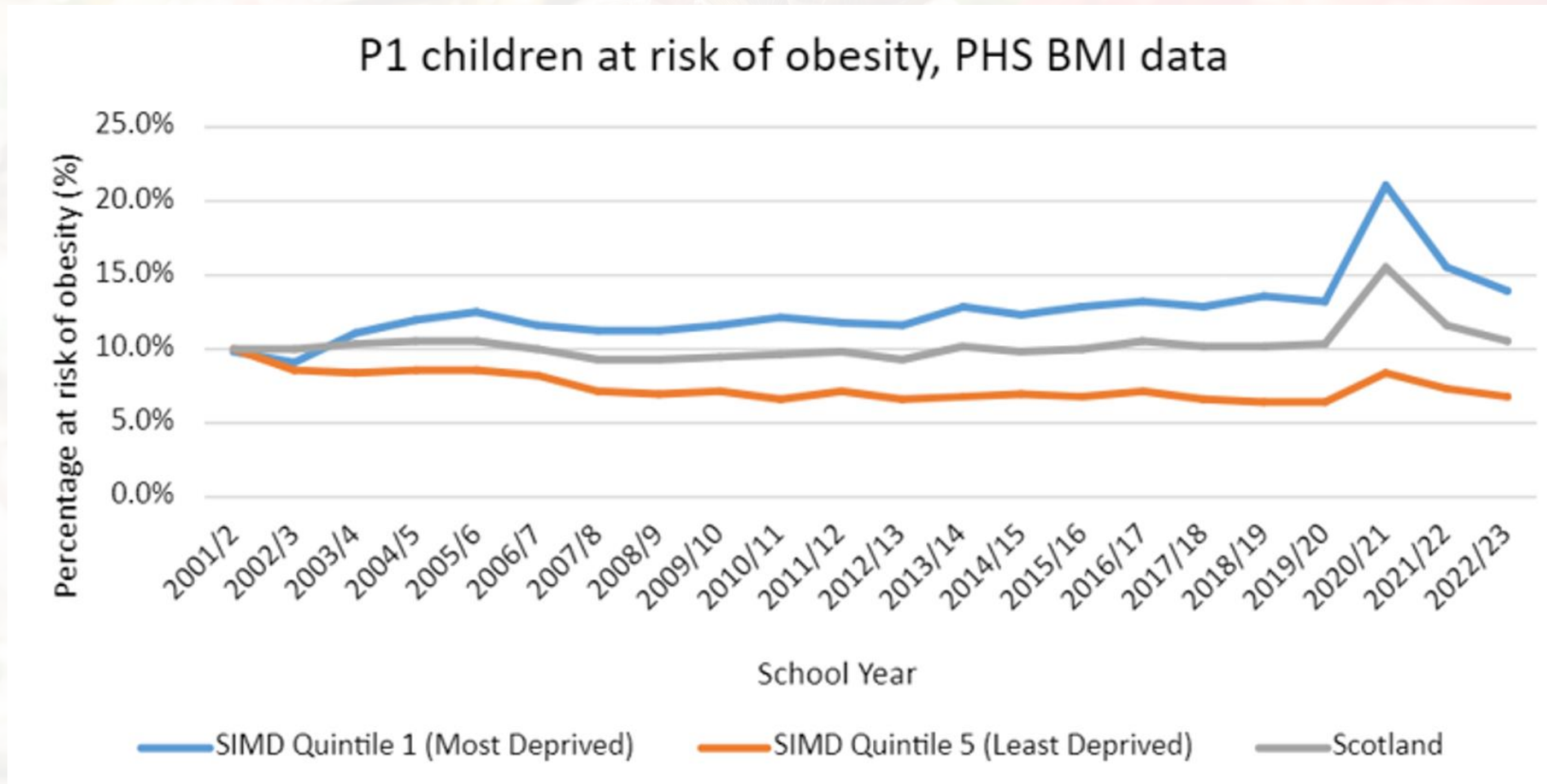
*What does weight
data for Scotland's
children tell us?*

The data



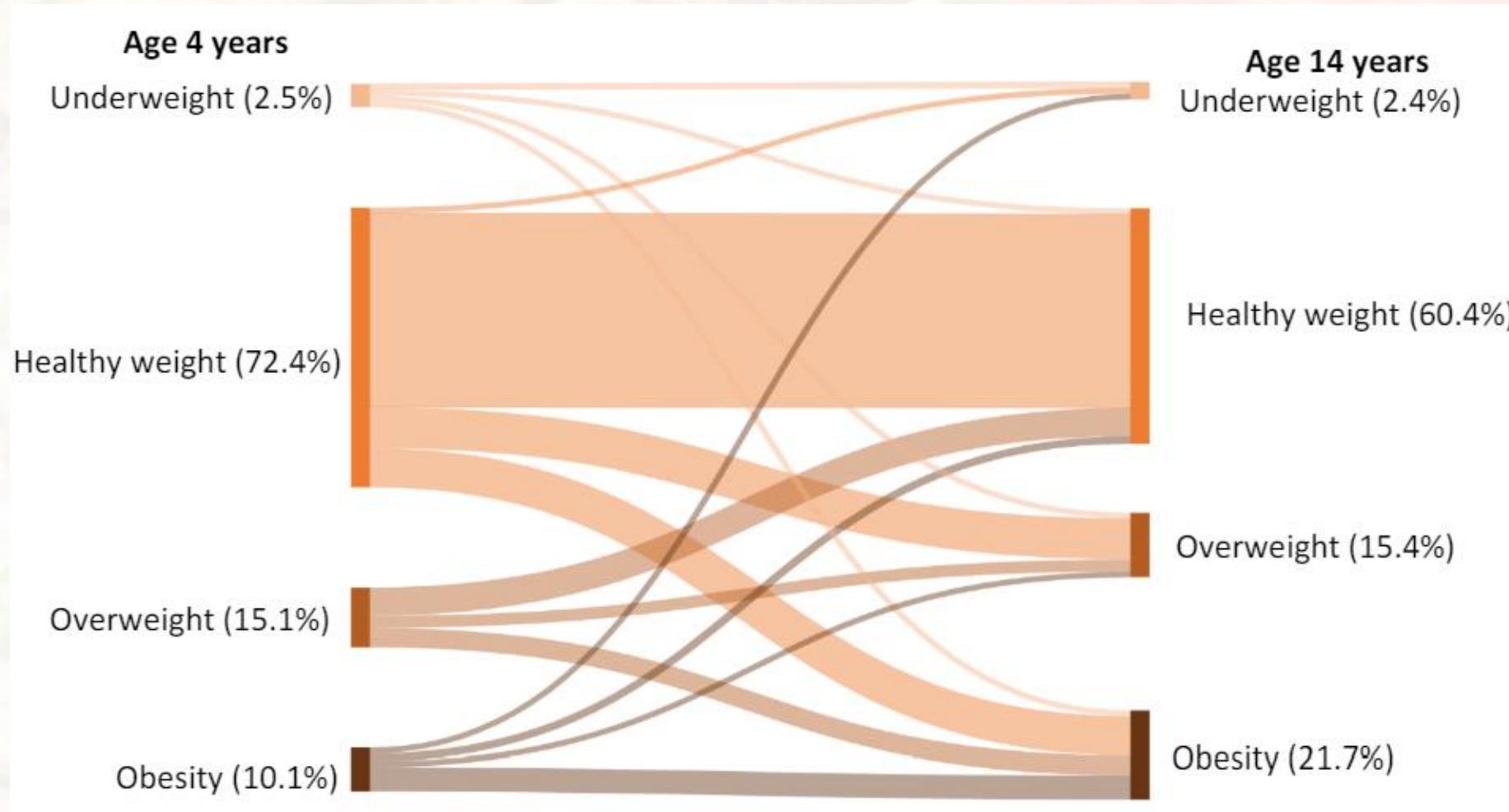
Children at risk of obesity vs 2030 ambition

The data



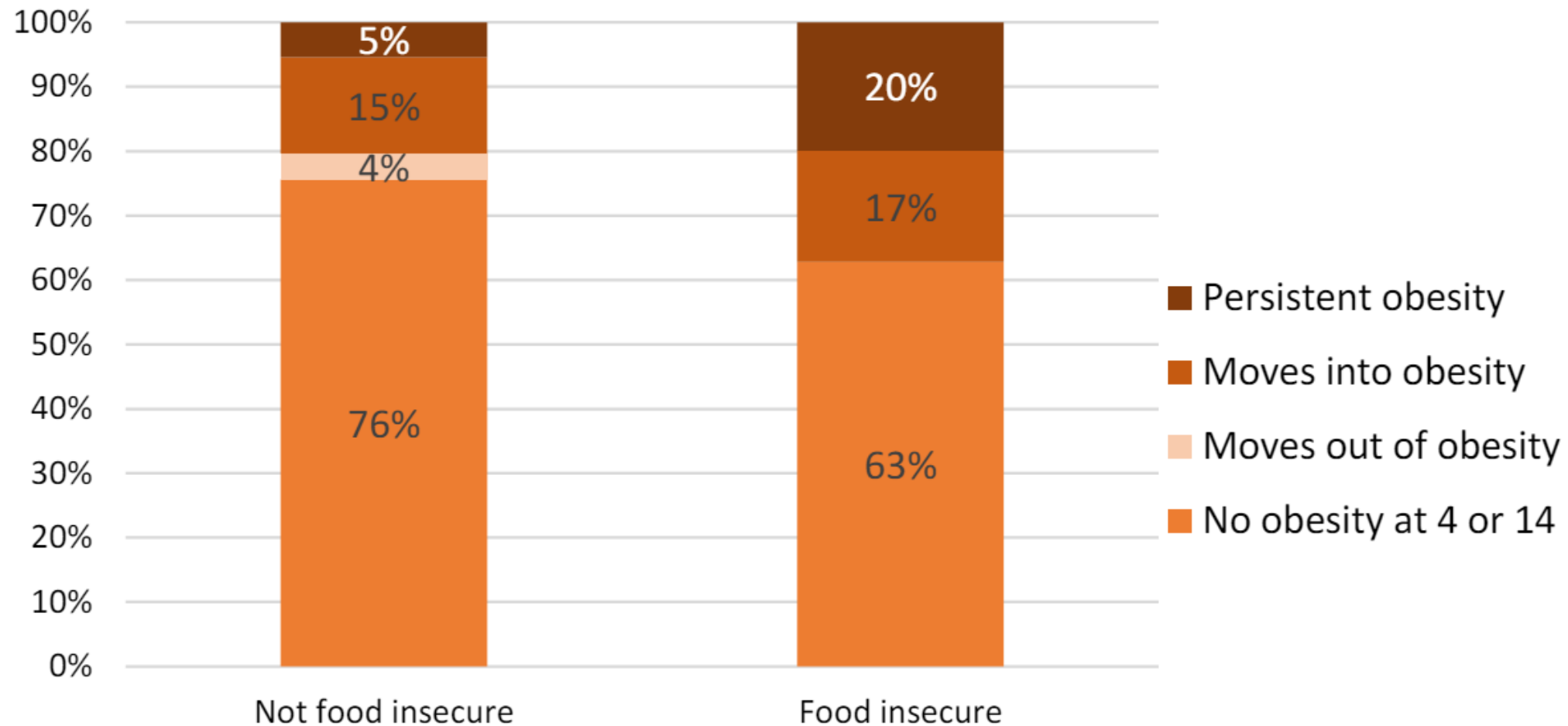
Primary 1 BMI statistics

The data



Growing up in Scotland Report

The data



Growing up in Scotland Report



The policy landscape in Scotland

Policy landscape



- 2018 Diet and healthy weight delivery plan
- Aim of promoting healthy weight in children
- Focus on changing the **food environment**
- Many of OAS's policy areas were included...

Policy landscape

Price and promotions of unhealthy food and drink

- e.g. BOGOFs, multi-buy deals, temporary price reductions
- Unhealthy products more often on promotion & more often purchased
- Can cause people to overspend
- **Regulations expected in 2025**



Policy landscape

Unhealthy food and drink when eating out

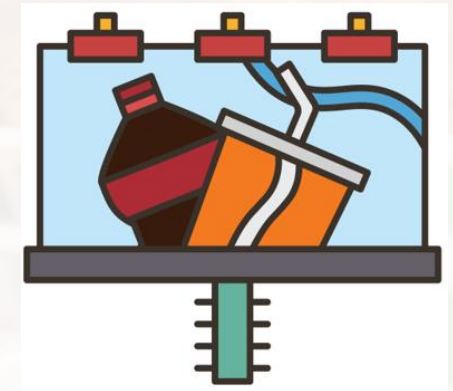
- e.g. restaurants, cafes, takeaways
- Typically sells energy dense, nutritionally poor food and drink
- Excessive portions, lack of nutrition info, takeaways cluster in deprived areas
- **Framework for sector being piloted**



Policy landscape

Advertising of unhealthy food and drink

- e.g. TV, social media, billboards, packaging
- Evidence shows it influences children's food preferences
- Ad spend heavily skewed towards unhealthy products - fruit and veg ads barely exist
- **No current action from Scottish Gov**



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“Adverts, adverts everywhere”

**Co-production of a youth advocacy video on
unhealthy food marketing in Scotland**

Dr Marissa J. Smith

MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit

University of Glasgow

Background

- In 2022, the WHO estimated that 39 million children globally were living with obesity
- In 2018, due to a concerning trend of high youth obesity rates in Scotland, the government aimed to reduce childhood obesity to 7% by 2030
- Most recent data available from the Scottish Health Survey 2022 shows that 18% of children aged 2-15 are now at risk of developing obesity
- Children particularly vulnerable to the messaging employed in marketing communications
- Exposure to unhealthy food marketing is a risk factor for childhood obesity development
- Despite widespread calls for action to safeguard children from the negative effects of food marketing, they remain exposed to sophisticated and persuasive marketing strategies

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Aim

To co-produce an animated video with young people to communicate their views on unhealthy food marketing to other young people and policymakers.

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Methods

Stage 1

Workshops with young people to discuss their exposure to and perceptions of unhealthy food advertising and ideas for the videos



Stage 2

Take photos and/or short videos of examples of unhealthy food advertising young people see in their daily life (including on social media)



Stage 3

Focus groups about the photos and/or videos young people took in Stage 2



Stage 4

A small group of 8-10 volunteers will help co-produce the advocacy videos

Results: Workshops



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Results: Workshops

"I think kids shouldn't grow up thinking there are foods they should and shouldn't eat and that food is food."

"Eating foods that have a lot of salt in them can be bad for you, especially for your heart."

"Healthy food should be offered more because unhealthy foods have more of a chance of being bought."

"It's people's decision and one option shouldn't be more expensive than the other."



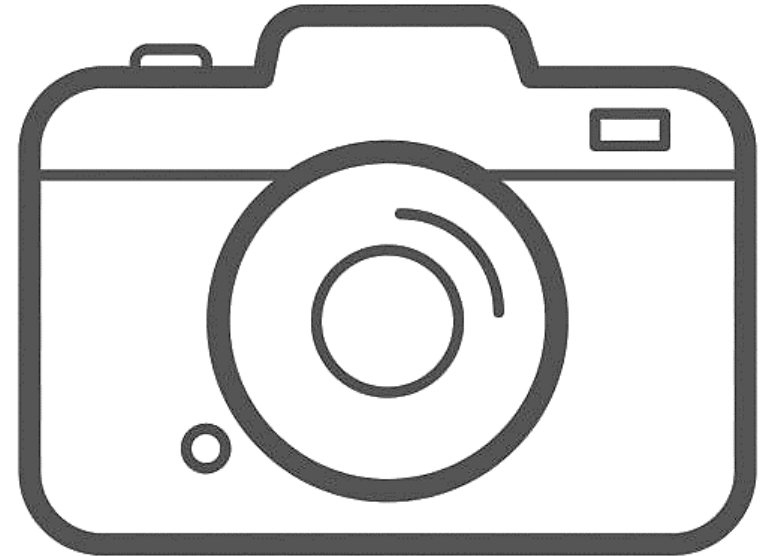
"Every single day walking to school, walking the street, EVERYWHERE!"

"I get very influenced by the internet and my friends. If they say it's good, I'll try it."

"If a food is popular online and people I know are buying it I want it more and want to buy it."

Results: Photo elicitation

- Of the 33 participants who took part in the first stage, 32 participants submitted photos
- We did not analyse the photos or videos for content but rather used the photos as discussion prompts during the focus group discussions in Stage 3



Results: Focus groups



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Exposure to unhealthy food advertising

*“Yes, I see them every day and just when I’m out for a walk.”
(Female, 16)*



*“Yeah, when you see the adverts, the adverts outside, you're normally, near a shop that's got them, that you can go to the place. So, you can just go there, and it's like five minutes.”
(Male, 14)*

“If you drive past bus stops, you can see them all the time. Because there's plenty just about the area.” (Female, 13)



“Yeah, like especially on my walk to school I go past quite a few bus stops and stuff, and there's quite a lot of advertisements and stuff for food.” (Female, 15)

“You don't tend to notice that you're actually being shown all these adverts like you're just watching YouTube. You just quickly skip past it. We don't even realize that you just got advertised to.” (Female, 14)



Design of adverts

“Probably the KFC one, again. Just because of the white background makes the red pop more, I think, and it makes it stand out more.” (Female, 16)



“It's got a deal in big letters, like big numbers. You can see that and you could just go in and get it on your walk home from school.” (Female, 15)



“I wasn't planning on getting a McDonald's, but when I walked past it [the advert], there was a McDonald's round the corner, and I thought, let's go and get a McDonald's.” (Female, 14)

“Promotions make you feel like you're getting a good deal if you buy that thing.” (Female, 14)

“If you go into a shop or something and they have something on promotion and it's £5 today, you might say I wasn't gonna get it, but now I want to get it because it's cheaper than usual.” (Female, 14)

“The way they market and promote foods and actually placing it the front to entice you to want to buy it and that's something I never really noticed until I started this.” (Male, 15)

Promotions



“If you were planning on going in to get two chocolate bars, then you've saved money. But if you were only planning on getting one, you've technically lost money, because you don't want that second chocolate bar. But you don't tell yourself that when you're buying it.” (Female, 14)

“You see them [promotions] and the end of the aisles and at the tills.” (Female, 16)

“They also like, put stuff right before you like pay. So, when you're going there and you see, something that you might want, you could just buy that as well.” (Female, 14)

Food branding

- Use of catch phrases and slogans

“ If it had a slogan or something, like that whistle at McDonald's, they have that whistle. If I saw that out, I would go in and be like, oh I want to try that. Also, if I just saw a KFC, Finger Licking Good. ”
Female, 12

- Brand loyalty

“ Normally I would get Pepsi if it was me choosing, but I do probably prefer Coke, but it's just 'cause I'll see Pepsi and it's brighter colours and it's more of an interesting logo I'm more likely to pick that up. ”
(Female, 15)

Perceptions of how food marketing could be changed

- Restrictions on the advertising of unhealthy food and drinks are needed

“ *I think less promotions and advertising of unhealthy stuff would make people not go and buy them as much because they're not seeing them.*

Male, 14

- Healthy foods should be advertised as often as unhealthy foods

“ *I feel it's always unhealthy fast food that you see. If I'd seen an advertisement saying, this is the new healthy burger, a healthier way of living, I would want to try it more than a McDonald's*

Female, 14

- Difficulty in implementing regulations on the advertising of unhealthy food

“ *If this did happen fast food locations would start advertising and serving small portions of healthy food so they could get around the advert regulations. They would just cover it up with some good food and then when people go check the menu when they go there, they find fast foods and then they'll still make business.*

Male, 14

Key findings

Food marketing regulations should better protect young people

Young people report seeing unhealthy food adverts **everyday...**

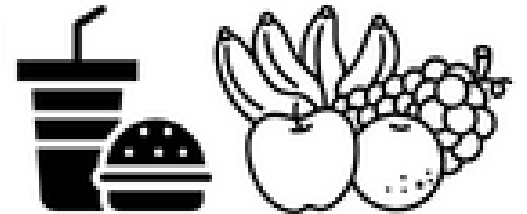


...particularly on billboards, posters, public transport locations and social media



Young people **are influenced** by unhealthy food adverts

According to young people, **unhealthy food** advertising should be **reduced** and **healthy food** advertising should be **increased**





Want to know more?

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X: [@Marissa_Smith8](#), [@theSPHSU](#)

Publications



Food advertising video



Scottish Obesity Alliance report



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