



Department
of Health &
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*From Nadine Dorries MP
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Sir George Howarth MP
By email to: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

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Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 14 May to Matt Hancock on behalf of a number of your constituents about the obesity strategy and eating disorders.

We understand that eating disorders are serious, life-threatening conditions and would like to assure you that it is not our intention that anyone should be harmed by our obesity strategy. We have been careful to consider the views of eating disorder charities and experts as we developed our plans for implementing the strategy, and we will continue to listen. We also recognise the importance of using appropriate language to avoid having an adverse impact on particular groups.

Nevertheless, we must recognise that obesity is a complex problem, caused by many different factors, to which there is no single solution. It is a leading cause of serious diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers, and can contribute to poorer mental health. It also increases the risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19. This represents a huge cost to the health and wellbeing of the individual, the NHS and the wider economy.

Calorie labelling on menus by large out-of-home sector businesses, including restaurants, cafes and takeaways with 250 or more employees, will ensure people are able to make informed decisions about the food and drink they and their families consume. Many businesses have led the way in displaying calorie labels, recognising the growing demand for it from their customers.

Evidence shows food in the out-of-home sector contains many more calories than the equivalent bought in a shop. Prepacked food in supermarkets is already required to have nutrition declaration on its packaging, including the energy value of the food in kilojoules and kilocalories and the amounts of fat, including separately identifying the amount of saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugar, protein and salt. Calorie labelling in the out-of-home sector is important to create transparency across the food industry and support efforts to encourage businesses to provide healthier options for their customers.

The NHS 12 Week Weight Loss Plan app is a starting point for people who are overweight or living with obesity, and supports them on their journey to lose weight and adopt healthier eating and physical activity habits over time. The app asks users to enter their height and weight to calculate their body mass index (BMI), as well as their age, to assess its suitability for them. To protect those with, or at risk of developing, an eating disorder,

users who are underweight or a healthy weight, according to their BMI, will see a message that explains that the app is not for them. In the 'discover' part of the app there is an additional section, 'more support and resources', that gives links to organisations to support those living with obesity and eating disorders. If a user is under 18, a message is shown that explains that the app is not suitable for them.

We consistently recommend that those people who are overweight or underweight take measures to move towards a healthy weight, and that those who have special dietary requirements, medical needs or a need for specialised nutritional advice seek advice from a registered healthcare professional.

We recognise that having an eating disorder can be utterly devastating for people suffering with the condition and for those around them, which is why we want to ensure that people have access to the right mental health support, in the right place, and at the right time.

Improving and expanding eating disorder services is a fundamental part of our commitment to transforming mental health services, with the *NHS Long Term Plan* committing at least a further £2.3billion a year to mental health services by 2023/24.

We are committed to ensuring everyone with an eating disorder has access to timely treatment based on clinical need, and that people continue to have support through their recovery. The Government is funding a new eating disorder study jointly led by King's College London and Beat, the eating disorder charity. The study aims to better understand what may lead to an eating disorder and how best to provide effective treatment.

On 5 March 2021, we announced that £79million of the additional £500million for mental health and NHS workforce announced at the spending review in November 2020, will be used to significantly expand children's mental health services. This additional funding will allow around 22,500 more children and young people to access community health services, 2,000 more children and young people to access eating disorder services and a faster increase in the coverage of mental health support teams in schools and colleges over the next financial year.

I hope this reassures your constituents that this Government takes eating disorders seriously and is committed to ensuring that people with eating disorders are able to access high-quality, vital mental health support.



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