WORLD OBESITY

POLICY & PREVENTION
(Formerly IOTF)

Working together to tackle obesity:
An advocacy toolkit for World Obesity members

/ Inspiring change globally

Part 1: The global burden of obesity

Part 1 gives a brief introduction and overview to the global burden of obesity and introduces the purpose of this toolkit

Obesity is one the most challenging public health problems that we face today, with prevalence rising at an alarming rate around the world. Obesity imposes a significant burden at an individual and societal level, both from a health and from an economic perspective.

There are around 475 million obese adults worldwide and over 1 billion adults who are considered to be overweight (1). Over 200 million school-age children are overweight, making this generation the first predicted to have a shorter lifespan than their parents (2). Whilst traditionally seen as a "disease of the developed world", significant increases in prevalence can be seen in many African and Latin American and Asian countries and it is increasingly common to see obesity alongside under-nutrition within the same country, community, household or even individual. This "double burden" can have serious consequences on the local economy and development prospects.

> **Defining obesity using Body mass index (BMI)**
> Underweight: <18.5
> Normal: 18.5-24.9
> Overweight: 25- 29.9
> Moderately Obese: 30-34.9
> Severely obese: 35 +

Worldwide, high body mass is the 6th leading disease burden (based on Disability-Adjusted Life Years DALYs) (3), with more than 3million deaths in 2010 attributed directly to it, independent of any further deaths associated with co-morbidities (4). Combined, overweight and obesity and physical inactivity are estimated to cause more than 6.5million deaths per year, more than that of tobacco smoking (4).

Furthermore, obesity increases the -of developing many other chronic diseases, accounting for approximately 60% of type 2 diabetes, over 20% of hypertension and coronary-heart disease, and between 10% and 30% of various cancers (2). Other co-morbidities include gall-bladder disease, fatty liver, sleep apnoea and osteoarthritis. Childhood obesity increases the risk of co-morbidities in later in life (5). There are also a multitude of adverse social and psychological conditions affecting mental and physical health, quality of life and workforce efficiency as well as putting a strain on health services.

/ Multiple causes of obesity

Obesity is caused by a complex interaction between environmental, social and genetic factors. We have evolved to store fat in times of plenty, to help prepare us for times of food shortage. For many people in the 21st Century however, those periods of shortage never come and weight gradually increases.

At an individual level, genetic and psychological factors are important determinants of obesity, providing some explanation for similarities within families as well as differences between individuals who have similar life experiences (6). However, they are not the only contributing factors and social and environmental situations affect an individual's likelihood of becoming overweight, whether due to accessibility and/or affordability to certain types of food, having a sedentary lifestyle and/or job, attitudes of peers or exposure to certain marketing.

Furthermore, genetics are also not sufficient explanations in themselves for the marked rise in obesity that has occurred over the past three decades at a population level. A change in the environment that we live in is the leading causal factor of the obesity epidemic. In particular, an increase in the consumption of energy dense foods such as ultra-processed, convenience foods which are high in fat, sugar and salt, coupled with a reduction in energy expenditure as communities become more reliant on public transport and active labour is replaced by machinery and desk based jobs. Ten out of 20 of the

leading causes of disease in the world are due to dietary patterns (3). Importantly, these factors are largely preventable and therefore offer us an opportunity to help tackle the rising obesity epidemic.

/ Tackling obesity

There is growing concern surrounding the prevalence of obesity and increasing efforts to prevent any further increase. The World Health Organisation has issued a number of statements regarding obesity, and activities can be seen at international, regional, national and local levels within Governments, academia, civil society and the private sector. As obesity is a complex issue, there is a need to mobilise all relevant interests, whether based in academia, health professionals or from other areas such as social science, psychology and education. By working together we can challenge the social and commercial causes of obesity so as to try and tackle the obesity epidemic itself.
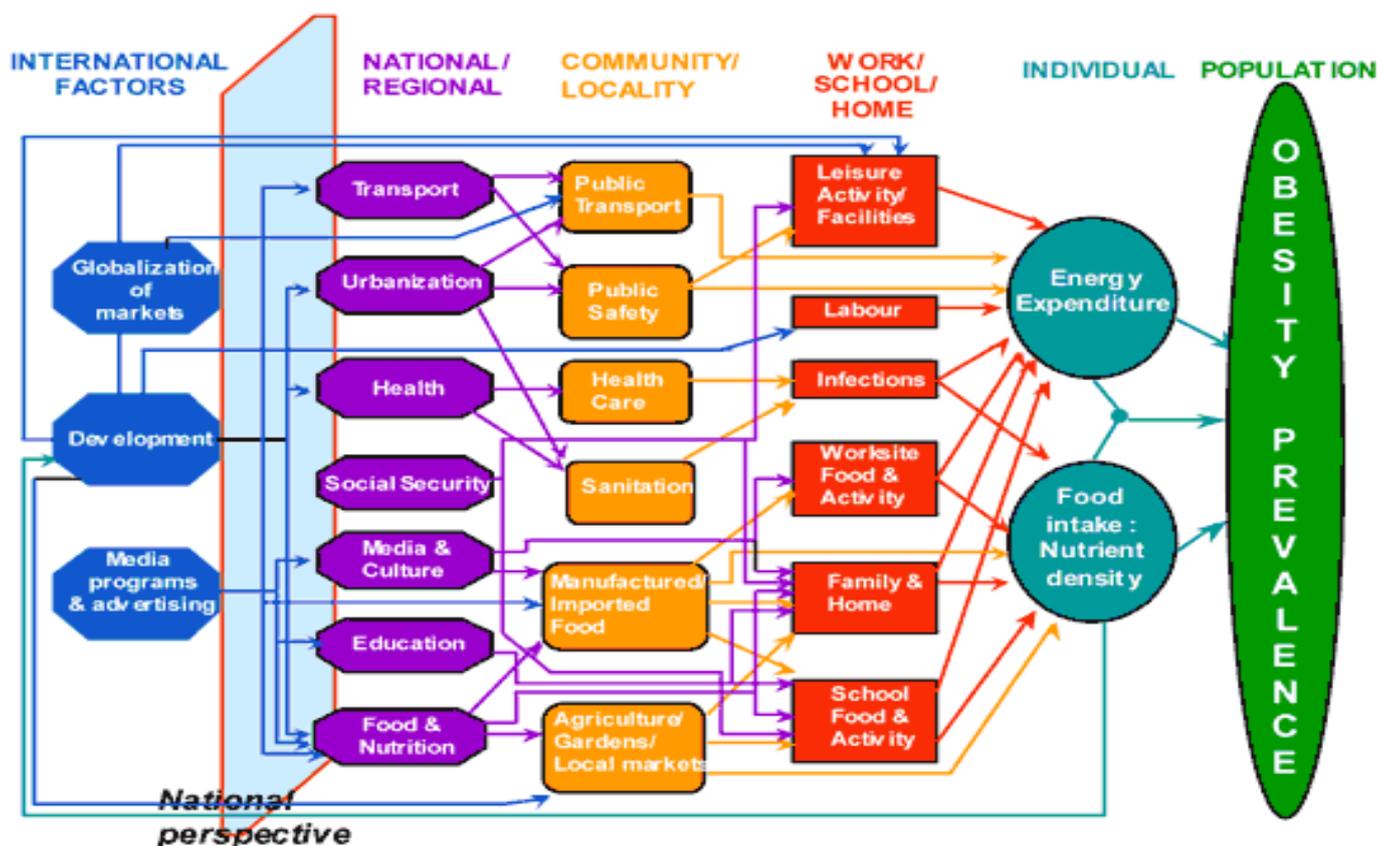
Figure1: The 'causal web; or factors leading to obesity (7)

Source: S Kumanyika et al, 2002

1.1 WHO Global Framework targets

In May 2013 the World Health Assembly adopted an omnibus resolution on reducing preventable non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular diseases. This resolution includes an endorsement of a World Health Organisation action plan to reduce premature mortality from NCDs by 25% by 2025, the adoption of 9 global targets with 25 indicators to reduce NCDs and a commitment to published a global coordination mechanism by the end of 2013. One of the 9 targets is to "halt the rise in (diabetes and) obesity by 2025" (8).

This resolution, and in particular the targets, were the product of a vast amount of advocacy action by a number of organisations and individuals around the world. The task ahead is now to engage governments at regional, national and local level to achieve these targets by 2025. As members of World Obesity you can play a role in initiating discussions and commitments within your own governments to implement the policies needed to tackle obesity.

Box 1: WHO Global Target Framework: Obesity & overweight target (8)
Target: "Halt the rise in diabetes and obesity by 2025"

Indicators of progress to include:
- *Age-standardized prevalence of overweight and obesity in adults aged 18+ years (defined as body mass index greater than 25 kg/m2 for overweigh or 30 kg/m2 for obesity)*
- *Age-standardized prevalence of overweight and obesity in adolescents (defined according to the WHO Growth Reference, overweight-one standard deviation BMI for age and sex and obese-two standard deviations BMI for age and sex)*
- *Adoption of national policies that limit saturated fatty acids and virtually eliminate partially hydrogenated vegetable oils in the food supply as appropriate within the national context and national programmes*
- *Policies to reduce the impact on children of marketing on foods and non-alcoholic beverages high in saturated fats, trans fatty acids, free sugars, or salt*

1.2 What is the purpose of this toolkit?

The purpose of this toolkit is to
- Offer support and advice to World Obesity members on how to advocate
- Provide key facts and figures that may help with advocacy work on obesity
- Promote an integrated approach to tackling obesity

1.3 Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit aims to provide the necessary background information, resources and key messages to allow us to move forward together to help combat obesity. It is designed to help support your work, allowing you to take into account the context and resources in your country.

Whether you are an academic, a medical doctor, a health care professional, a policy director or a civil society advocate you can play a role in advocating for improved food environments to improve health. Advocates can be individuals or work within community groups, expert groups or organisations with an issue close to their heart.

Part 2: An introduction to Advocacy

Part 2 aims to provide you with an overview of advocacy, including an outline of the different types of advocacy and some tips to get you started

The aim of advocacy is to influence decision makers on a specific issue, putting forward a strong case for action.

Specifically in relation to obesity it can be defined as activities aimed at "Improving global health by promoting the understanding of obesity and weight-related diseases through scientific research and dialogue, whilst encouraging the development of effective policies for their prevention and management".

Often advocacy work is done in collaboration with other like-minded stakeholders. Depending on the specific goal, advocacy work can target politicians, government departments, the industry, members of the public and/or other stakeholders. The following toolkit aims to provide insight and ideas about how we can collectively and individually ensure that the obesity agenda is taken seriously by Governments and the private sector alike all around the world.

The most effective advocacy and campaigning involves consistent messages and calls for actions. World Obesity and its global membership are in a unique position to push forward the obesity agenda together, working from the same key positions.

2.1 Why is advocacy important?

Evidence-based or evidence-informed policy is considered an important part of policy making, where problems are identified and measured along with policy options and solutions such as efficacy and potential consequences, in order to evaluate the benefit of a particular policy solution. In theory this means your job as an advocate is to present policymakers with the appropriate evidence in support of the policy in question. In reality the power of different interest groups is imbalanced, with some organisations having stronger influence than others. The diagram below shows this power conflict in the case of marketing food to children.

By working together we can help to increase the influence of those working in the public rather than market interest.

Figure 2: stakeholders with different interests do not have equal influence on policies. Adapted from Lobstein & Polmark Consortium, 2010 (9)
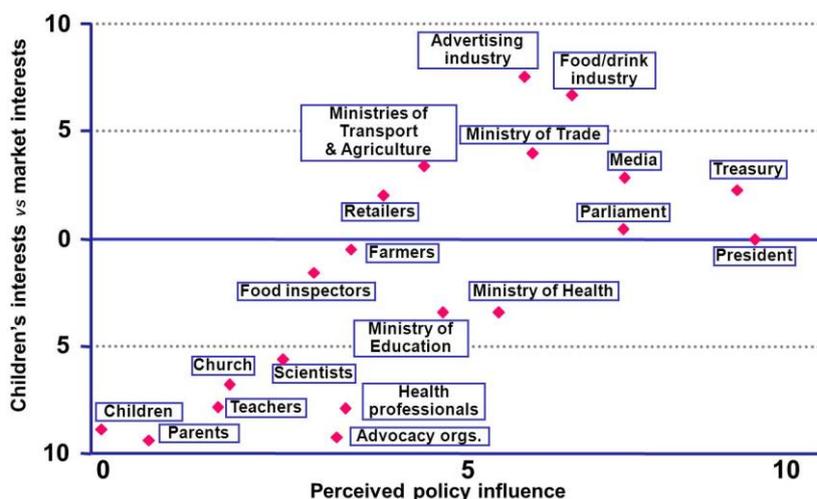
/ Advocacy and obesity

The WHO global targets framework provides us with the global political leverage to make a difference in our own regions and countries. This will involve
- Addressing the complex interacting factors in order to prevent/halt the trend of rising obesity, with environmental and social shifts towards a less obesogenic promoting environment.
- Increasing understanding, support and treatment of those who are obese to reduce individual risk of co-morbidities

Whether you want to increase bariatric care, educate people about the health effects of obesity or improve the food system, there will be policies and processes in place which you need to influence in order to reach (or get closer) to your goals. The steps to be taken are:

✓ Know the issue	✓ Engage with politicians
✓ Understand the policy process	✓ Communicate effectively
✓ Establish goals	✓ Use the media
✓ Develop key messages	✓ Keep up to date
✓ Build relationships with stakeholders	✓ Monitor your progress

2.2 Types of advocacy

Advocacy covers a number of different activities all of which can be valuable in different contexts. They may be used independently of one another, although they are best used together. It is important to consider how you frame the problem and also to take advantage of political opportunity wherever possible. This is when working in collaboration with others can be beneficial as it allows everyone involved to play to their strengths.

Direct advocacy, that is advocacy directed at the policy makers, is most suitable when an issue has already gained some political backing– for instance if you are in support of/against a particular bill, a consultation is in process or a high-profile meeting is upcoming. This kind of advocacy usually involves
a. Holding meetings with and/or writing to politicians expressing concern/alerting them to the issue
b. Responding to consultations put out by the Government
c. Issuing a report and/or press release which provides evidence in support of your cause

Indirect advocacy
Often advocacy has a broader remit, with the aim of raising awareness amongst the public and initiating debate on the topic area. Indirect advocacy can be useful prior to targeting policymakers directly, or simultaneously with direct advocacy with the aim of adding weight to your view with public support.
a. Meeting and collaborating with non-governmental groups, charities and research groups
b. Organising consumer awareness activities such as local events, public calls for action, petitions, advertisements
c. Holding an event/conference/meeting with stakeholders to get support, apply political pressure, discuss actions can be a valuable tool for advocacy
d. Carrying out research with the specific aim to get media coverage, most often survey work
e. Writing reports or briefing documents which serve to highlight the problem and/or the solutions
f. Producing regular newsletters to engage stakeholders and keep them up to date with developments in the area
g. Using social media to get message widely heard

Three key components of effective advocacy are 1) taking advantage of political opportunity 2) framing messages so as to generate the maximum interest possible and 3) mobilizing resources to increase your power and to allow you to advocate effectively.

Figure 3: The advocacy process (10)

Figure 7: The Advocacy Process
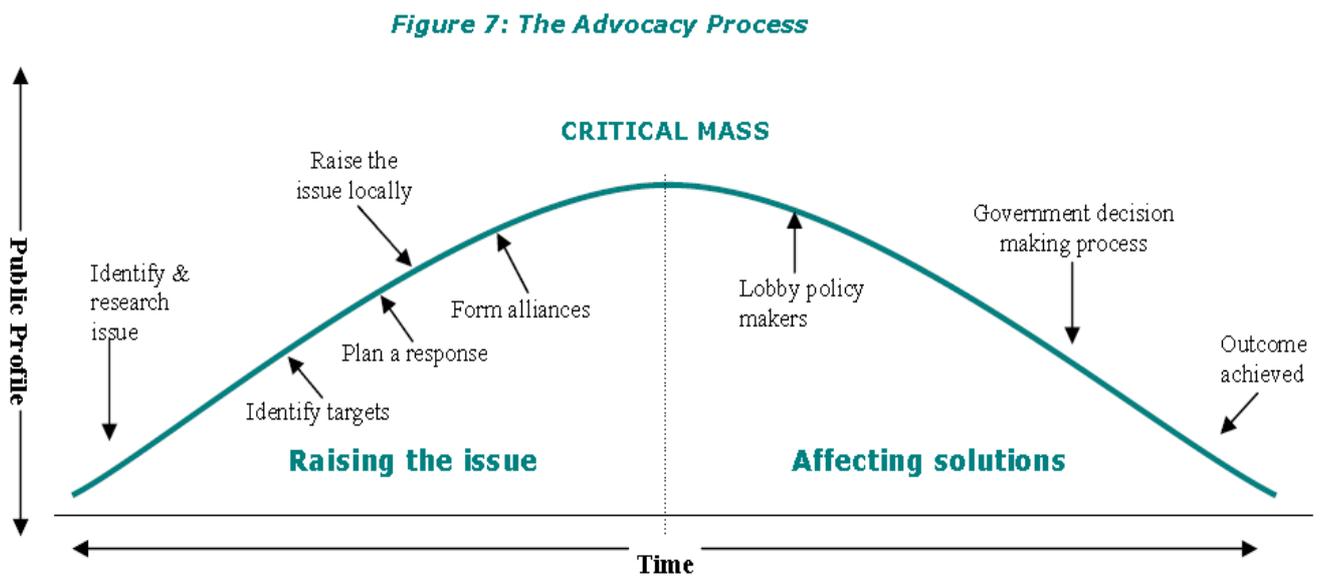
Source: Lin et al, 2004

2.3 Before you start

a) Getting to know the issue

/ Understanding the problem and the causes
1. Gather information on obesity prevalence, co- morbidities, trends, forecasts for your country.
   - World Obesity hosts an obesity data portal with BMI information for a number of countries around the world http://www.iaso.org/resources/obesity-data-portal/
   - If your country isn't there but you have the details send them to World Obesity and we will include them in the prevalence data and maps that we provide

/ Consider the solutions
2. Gather information on policies and initiatives already in place in your country or region e.g. marketing pledges, healthy eating schemes, taxes, sports schemes.
   - Help keep World Obesity informed of policy work in your area. It may help us create good practice guides for others to use http://www.iaso.org/publications/trackingobesity/submitpolicyinformation/
3. Be sensitive to other issues, such as financial restraints, as well as any potential negative effects that could occur
4. Identify both short and long term "wins" – short term is good for getting issues higher on the agenda, while longer term is more likely to make a sustained difference.

b) Understand your legal and political systems

The political situation and legal context is different in every country so it is important that you are aware of these processes in your own country. This will, in many cases, inform how you advocate on obesity issues in your area. This toolkit aims to aid your work while giving you flexibility to do what is right for you.

You also need to be aware of the different activities and policies at international, national, regional and local, level. The processes involved with be different and you'll need to familiarise yourself with the opportunities that lie within each government level.

2.4 Establish your goals and messages

a) Goals

Your overall policy goals should be consistent with the WHO recommendation to halt the rise in obesity by 2025.

Two of the WHO indicators of progress include the adoption of policies that reduce saturated fat in food and policies that reduce marketing exposure for children. Setting goals related to these will help you to progress the policy programmes in your area whilst also working towards the WHO overall goal.
Other goals could be on issues such as

- Physical activity
- School meals
- Sugar reformulation
- In-store promotions

- Labelling
- Junk food taxes
- Childhood obesity
- Bariatric surgery

- Education of health care professionals
- Transport/town planning issues

You should try to fit in to, and be sympathetic towards, established campaigns run by other organisations and priorities of your government in order to achieve wider objectives. e.g. economy, health, social issues, sustainability, education. Agree priority actions to achieve your goals.

b) Framing the problem with key messages

Making sure that you frame your problem (and the solution) around clear messages will be important in initiating concern. Having clear messages in relation to your goals will help improve the clarity and effectiveness of your activity. Clearly identifying the problem is the first step, making sure that you communicate it in the right way to the right people.

Also important is being clear about what action you are calling for and what the desired solutions are. In particular make sure you address any practical issues e.g. the cost implications which will be important to the decision maker.

There are lots of different components to advocacy and it is important to work out what will work for you. It is likely that a combination of activities will be most effective. For instance fundamental changes occur slowly, with activity based on negotiations and compromise in meetings, letters and consultations. "Easy" wins and "controversial" issues may get a better response via campaigning and media work.

/ Your messages should:
- *Be simple*, focused, relevant, meaningful and suitable for the culture you are dealing with. Stick to the point.
- *Keep to the facts* - Be shocking and stir imagination/provoke emotion whilst remaining credible and appealing.
- *Be tactical* – be persistent and realistic, accept and expect small wins (while keeping your eye on the main target) and be willing to compromise (but aim high)
- Emphasise the huge burden, particularly economic burden, of obesity which policy makers have the power to change

c) Get the timing right

Timing is a crucial feature of successful advocacy efforts, as political cycles and agendas can be fairly rigid. By identifying points in the calendar that will be useful and/or present opportunity for change you can maximise the likelihood that your message gets heard. For instance, be aware of political party debates, WHO meetings, consultations and elections (local and national).

The exception to this is in a time of "crisis", when an event happens which is viewed as sufficiently important or urgent enough to require immediate action. In such opportunities events may happen rapidly and it is important that you are available to respond and advocate as required. For this reason it is important to have clearly established positions and goals, ready to be used when required.

2.5 Partnership building

Working together is vital to initiate change and is an invaluable resource. Drawing on expertise from researchers, health professionals, campaigners and policy experts provides you with a strong evidence base for taking forward an issue to Government. By working in collaboration you are acknowledging that you don't have skills or knowledge in everything. Building up a relationship with politicians and policymakers can also be useful in getting your message heard.

When starting to consider your advocacy work it will be useful if you identify
   a. Who is active in the area already e.g. academics, charities, community groups, local governments
   b. Who are the key parliamentary figures, e.g. the MP who focuses on health, wellbeing, school food

In both cases it is useful to note who is on your side and who is opposed to your cause, both within and outside of government. You may identify a number of stakeholders who are opposed to your view, either explicitly or implicitly through their own campaigns. While it may not be useful to collaborate with them, keeping an eye on their activities will prove valuable to ensure that your work is not undermined.

	Supporters	Opposition
Very important	Mobilise their interest, enthusiasm, keep them informed and involved	Develop strategies to manage or reduce their antagonism
Important	Keep them onside and ensure they remain supportive	Monitor their position to be ready to respond

/ Policymaker collaboration

Identifying and building rapport with politicians who are sympathetic to your cause can help give weight to your activity. Furthermore, identifying other non-governmental organisations (NGO) or academics that hold similar views can help to strengthen the messages you put out. Building partnerships, particularly with those who have access to complementary resources or expertise will be of particular value to you.

/ Stakeholder Collaboration

Working in collaboration with other like-minded groups and individuals can help strengthen messages, share knowledge and experience and broaden resources available. Relationships can vary from informal information sharing, to coalitions producing co-signed letters and consultation responses. It is more likely that you will have a positive response if it is apparent that your view is widely held.

/ Potential stakeholders who may be of value to you when advocating on obesity issues include

	Industry	Experts	Government departments
Nutrition	Agriculture, manufacturers, retailers, trade bodies	Caterers, teachers, health experts, academics	Health, environment, education
Physical	Sports clubs, gyms,	Health experts, teachers,	Transport, town planning,

activity	equipment specialists	community groups, academics	education
Health care	Pharmaceutical companies, surgical equipment	Community groups, health professionals and unions, academics	Health, social welfare

/ Conflicts from collaboration

When collaborating with others it is important to be mindful of potential conflicts of interest that may arise directly or indirectly from collaborating. Collaborations can cause conflicts where agendas are too different or conflicting and while compromise is often possible it should not be at the expense of reaching your goal. See Appendix 3 for more information.

2.6 Keep up to date

Research and policies that effect obesity agendas can be fast paced so it is important to keep up to date with the latest developments to ensure your activities remain relevant. Google alerts, newsletters, e-bulletins, twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and RSS feeds can all be useful in keeping up to date with activities, progress, publications and events about obesity.

World Obesity offers a weekly news bulletin service (Sign up here: http://www.iaso.org/news/) which summarises the latest research and news related to obesity as well as a monthly newsletter with updates of our work. World Obesity also has a LinkedIn group and Twitter account which provide regular news updates and the opportunity for discussion of current obesity related issues.

Useful key words for Google alerts include: obesity; overweight; bariatric; junk food; marketing; advertising; food industry; weight-loss; BMI

2.7 Monitor your progress

Policy change doesn't happen overnight, nor does it happen in one go. Slow progress is to be expected, with many small progressive steps made over time. Often it requires a look back in time to fully appreciate where progress has (or hasn't) been made.

Monitoring progress is important to allow you to assess where you are and where you need to go in order to meet your goals. Monitoring can be done both directly on your work, but also looking at the wider issues which may have altered for a number of reasons (e.g. prevalence of obesity).

/ Process indicators:
- media hits
- social media interactions
- networks
- meeting numbers with officials
- letters sent
- supporter/membership numbers

/ Progress indicators:
- reduction in obesity
- Increase in activity
- reduction in calorie consumption
- adoption of a policy

Part 3: Advocacy activities and resources

Part 3 suggests some key activities you may consider as part of your advocacy programme. A lot of the information in this section is supported by material in the appendix 5 and 6.

There are a wide range of activities and resources that are useful in advocacy, ranging from large scale campaigns, events/conferences and reports, to smaller scale activities such as presenting research findings, responding to consultations, issuing press releases and using social media. Depending on your resources you may work 'behind the scenes', dealing direct with politicians and focusing on ensuring scientific accuracy, or you may involve yourself in a large campaign which also functions to raise consumer awareness, engages a wider number of stakeholders and lends itself to more debate on this issue.

Some examples of activities include:

- ✓ Holding meetings with politicians, other stakeholders
- ✓ Writing letters to politicians, stakeholders expressing concern/alerting them to the issue
- ✓ Forming coalitions with like-minded stakeholders
- ✓ Responding to consultations put out by the Government
- ✓ Writing reports/ briefings/position statements which serve to highlight the problem and/or the solutions
- ✓ Producing regular newsletters to engage stakeholders and keep them up to date with the developments in the area
- ✓ Putting out press releases about a new campaign, new research or expressing a point of view
- ✓ Use of a website to promote activity, viewpoint, developments
- ✓ Use of social media e.g. Twitter/LinkedIn/Facebook to disseminate your message

For advice on what may be most suitable for your causes see Appendix 5 and 6.

3.1 Media

The media is considered a powerful tool for spreading a particular message to a large number of people. The media can be used to help shape public discussion and debate as well as offering the opportunity to address misconceptions related to a particular issue. The media can be used passively (e.g. responding to media enquiries) or in a more active way (e.g. issuing press statements, writing blogs and letters). Regular use of the media allows you to build up a relationship with journalists and engage them in the messages that you want to spread.

- ✓ Print media e.g. newspapers and magazines - *See appendix 7 for an example press release and some tips for writing your own*
- ✓ TV, radio – Either an exclusive TV programme or as part of media coverage from a press release. Can also be used as a platform for a debate or discussion with other stakeholders.
- ✓ Social media – e.g twitter, Linkedin and Facebook as a platform for getting your message out to a wide audience. *See appendix 4 for some advice on using social media*
- ✓ Website- to promote activity, viewpoint, developments

3.2 Direct communication with politicians and policymakers

Building a relationship with decision-makers and policy advisors can be a good way to get your voice heard and to make your presence and interest on an issue known. Holding meetings with, or writing to, politicians to express concern and raise awareness to an issue is a low cost way to try and stimulate action. Minutes and responses from meetings can be documented making this form of advocacy easy to monitor and evaluate. Government departments often put out tenders for particular research to be conducted which may provide you with an opportunity to work closely with them.

Planning: Before going to a meeting make sure you plan what you are going to say; think of it as a sales pitch. First and foremost try to engage them with the issue and the implications (cost and health in particular) of the problem and/your findings. Have a simple 'ask' – i.e. a clear request for action that you want them to undertake

3.2 Consultation responses

Governments regularly conduct public consultations on issues which require stakeholder feedback. Usually anyone can respond to these, so keep an eye out for consultations in your area of interest. It is often worth liaising with other stakeholders if there are specific points you wish to reinforce and emphasise. This can be done on an informal basis (e.g. sharing responses) or more formally via a joint response. Bear in mind that stakeholders with a vested interest, e.g. the food or pharmaceutical industry, may also be responding, so where possible pre-empt what they may say and address this in your response. See appendix 9 for an example.

3.4 Reports & data collection

Collecting data and evidence and presenting it in the form of reports, updates and/or press releases can be a powerful tool and evidence base to support your campaign and useful for presenting your case to relevant stakeholders, such as policymakers or industry representatives. Examples include
- Literature research on the problem and solutions
- The state of environments (e.g. locality of fast food outlets, prices of fruit and vegetables, availability of cycle lanes)
- Existing policies (e.g. school food, marketing, bariatric surgery access)
- Progress made towards targets (e.g. meeting voluntary commitments, health outcomes)
- Good practice examples; naming and shaming; case studies; benchmarking
- cost-effectiveness

3.5 Briefings and guidelines

Briefing papers summarise the situation, present new ideas and offer suggestions for future activities. They can be distributed to different stakeholders to emphasise the problem that you are concerned with and ensure you keep a consistent message. Position statements can be written in context of wider debates/policy and clearly state your position on an issue and what your goals.

You could also consider developing your own guidelines which you want to be adopted to solve a particular issue. Developing your own guidelines provides your target audience with clear guidance on how you think it should move forward

3.6 Coalitions

Demonstrating to policy makers that you have widespread support for your positions and proposals can help validate what you are advocating. By forming coalitions and collaborating with others, ideally from a

wide range of disciplines, and demonstrating a united front on an issue you can increase your credibility in the field you are working in.

A coalition usually involves a position statement which is co-signed by a number of organisations and individuals who feel strongly about the issue.

3.7 Expert advisory role

If you are an expert in your field you may have the opportunity to be part of an expert panel, meeting or to take on an advisory role. If you do, this is an opportunity to ensure that the policymakers are presented with all the information necessary for them to make a judgment which is first or foremost made with the public interest in mind.

3.8 Events

Holding an event, conference or roundtable meeting with stakeholders can be a valuable advocacy tool in order to increase support, apply political pressure or to discuss future actions. When organising an event there are a number of considerations depending on the intended purpose of the event and the audience. These include

- ✓ Consider the choice of venue, audience and time
- ✓ Have a realistic budget, agenda and timetable
- ✓ Be media friendly
- ✓ Plan materials
- ✓ Know your audience and pitch topic/content appropriately
- ✓ Stay on point with speakers selected and themes
- ✓ Take note of lessons learnt
- ✓ Consider the event's output and how this may be used for future activities

3.9 Consumer awareness activities

Any change, whether policy based or at an individual level, requires engagement with and the support of members of the public. Consumer focused campaigns can be useful tools, particularly when aiming to raise awareness on an issue or to get support from a large number of people. They are typically based on a key goal which may be independent of, or feed into other advocacy work.

Engagement can be undertaken in a variety of ways, including local/community events, public calls for action, petitions or advertisements.

3.10 Disseminating research

There is a growing and highly important need for more inter- and multi-disiplinary work in the field of public health and obesity. If you are an academic conducting cellular, mechanistic or clinical trials, consider how your findings may be useful for public health policy and make sure you alert the relevant people to your work. By linking up the different fields of research and working in a collaborative way we will advance our understanding and knowledge in the area and be more likely to make a significant difference to the health of individuals and populations.

World Obesity publishes four leading obesity journals. If you're active in research why not submit a paper to one of our journals to help get your message communicated to the rest of the field? Even if you

aren't in a position to advocate yourself, your research findings may be a valuable addition to an advocate's evidence base and may help them get their message heard.

Presenting your work at conferences is another good way to get your message heard. In particular, you can apply the findings to a policy context which supports (or refutes) calls to actions, provides further evidence ahead of an upcoming consultation or decision, or stimulates action in your area. Data slides can be found on the World Obesity website which may help you put your findings in context of the obesity problem in the population groups relevant to your research.

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