

# Slimming World's *2019 manifesto*

*to reduce obesity and support families and individuals to lead happier, healthier lives*

## Introduction to Slimming World

Slimming World was founded by Margaret Miles-Bramwell in 1969 with the mission to create a very different type of weight loss organisation; one that respects and never humiliates its members and one whose success depends on delivering exceptional service. The core values of respect, kindness, care, empathy and empowerment still drive the company today.

Slimming World is now the UK's largest independent weight management organisation. We hold around 19,000 weekly groups across Britain – in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland – run by a network of 5,000 community-based Slimming World Consultants. More than 900,000 members attend groups in community venues each week and up to 70,000 members use our digital service, Slimming World Online.

Slimming World's programme consists of a multi-component approach in which a highly developed support system is used to facilitate changes in behaviour, diet, and activity levels, providing our members with the tools to make long-term sustainable changes to lose weight and stay slim for life.

Our programme is a sophisticated process of individual support in a powerfully motivating group setting made simple for our members, who learn how to plan, shop, cook and eat more healthily and are encouraged and supported to become more physically active. Above all, we know that there is nothing more powerful in ensuring long-term success than being part of a motivating and inspiring Slimming World group or community.

## Slimming World's vision

- To change the negative public perception of people who are overweight and ensure that everyone is treated with kindness, compassion, care and respect, regardless of their weight. We recognise that many people who are overweight carry a double burden: the burden of weight, but also of guilt and shame. It is vitally important that people who struggle with their weight are never judged, humiliated or discounted.
- To create equality of access, ensuring that every person who is overweight has the opportunity to access, or be signposted to, an effective evidenced-based weight management service developed on the successful core principles of healthy eating, physical activity and support to achieve sustainable habits to help stay slim for life.
- To ensure that clear, consistent advice and guidance is given by government, Local Authorities and associated agencies on the most effective way to achieve long-term weight management using proven, evidence-based weight management services.
- To tackle obesity through a whole-family approach by giving people the information and tools to make changes. This includes men, young people and harder to reach communities. Long-term weight management can be achieved by a combination of a sustainable healthy eating plan – based on normal everyday food that is filling and low in energy density – a phased activity programme and on-going compassion, understanding and support. These behaviours can be passed on to the whole family, meaning that this and future generations develop healthy lifestyles too.
- To contribute to the improvement of health professionals' awareness and understanding in raising the issue of weight with patients, and supporting effective behaviour change in a compassionate, non-judgemental way that empowers people to make healthy lifestyle changes.
- To share with policy-makers and health authorities Slimming World's enormous wealth of research data, insight and understanding about weight management across large population groups. We have a dataset of 1.3 million slimmers, the largest weight management dataset in the world.



touching hearts, changing lives

## Why is this manifesto needed?

Since the European referendum in 2016, Brexit has dominated the political agenda at the cost of domestic public health policy. It is imperative that politicians across the political spectrum now pledge to work together to deliver the actions needed to save the UK from the biggest public health crisis it has ever faced: obesity.

In Chief Medical Officer Professor Dame Sally Davies' outgoing statement *Time to Solve Childhood Obesity: An Independent Report* she stated that 'only radical action' will give the Government any chance of getting close to its target of halving childhood obesity by 2030.

Over the past four years, successive prime ministers have had differing approaches towards how to tackle obesity, for instance on the effectiveness of a 'sugar tax', and this lack of consistency has led to confusion among the public and health professionals.

A pattern of changing political priorities leaves the millions of people whose lives are impacted by obesity unsupported and leaves health professionals on the front line with little to offer the people in their care.

There is no doubt that obesity is both complex and multifaceted. However, Slimming World believes that by adopting these five calls, a new government will be in a far better position to make a very real impact on obesity which blights so many lives and has created an unsustainable financial burden on the NHS. The obesity epidemic needs everyone – health professionals, politicians, policy-makers and industry experts – to agree a strategy and, crucially, stick to it.

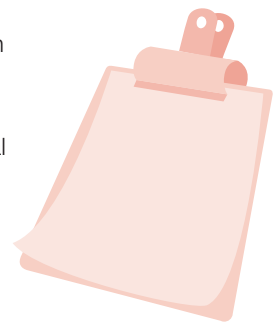
## The facts about obesity in the UK: 2019

By 2050, it is predicted that the number of adults in the UK who are obese will rise by 73% to 26 million people. As well as the serious physical conditions linked with obesity, people who struggle with their weight often experience stigmatisation which can affect their self-esteem and mental health.

NHS Digital data shows that in 2018-19, almost 1.1 million patients in England were admitted to hospital with a diagnosis of obesity. That's up from 884,000 the year before, a rise of almost one quarter in just a year.<sup>1</sup>

People who reduce their weight to a healthy level are less likely to develop health conditions related to excess weight, such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Implementing strategies to help cut obesity rates can relieve the heavy financial burden that obesity-related treatments place on the NHS. Here's a snapshot of the facts:

- Obesity, through direct medical costs and its impact on productivity, costs the UK 3% of its GDP, equivalent to £60 billion in 2018.<sup>2</sup>
- In the last year of primary school, on average, six children out of a class of 30 are obese and a further four are overweight, twice as many as 30 years ago.<sup>2</sup>
- Obesity disproportionately affects children living in deprived areas and also disproportionately impacts on ethnic minority groups.<sup>2</sup>
- Being overweight or obese increases the risk of complications for pregnant women and their babies. More than 50% of maternal mortality has been associated with overweight and obesity in the UK (MBRRACE, 2018), and over 25% of mothers who had stillbirths in 2017 were obese (MBRRACE, 2019). The higher a woman's BMI, the higher the risks.<sup>3,4</sup>
- Overweight and obesity are the second biggest preventable cause of cancer in the UK – more than 1 in 20 cancer cases are caused by excess weight.<sup>5</sup>



# Slimming World's call to government

## Call 1: A national voice for obesity

The NHS's weight management programmes and assessed referrals systems are not working effectively; there are gaps in the provision of the adult programmes and also gaps as patients transfer from child to adult services.

The growing obesity epidemic, and a reduction in government funding, make it increasingly difficult for Local Authorities to sustain the commissioning of weight management programmes both in terms of the treatment and prevention.

Slimming World believes that the Government must take back responsibility for weight management and is calling for a national voice to champion an effective, consistent weight management programme across the UK to support people of all ages whose health and physical and mental wellbeing are at risk because of obesity.

**We are calling on the Government to take responsibility for commissioning local, effective weight management programmes that deliver an effective low-cost intervention on a national scale.**

An independent economic evaluation shows that primary care referral to Slimming World provides value for money against the standards set by NICE.<sup>6</sup>

## Call 2: Training for health professionals to enable sensitive and skilled conversation about weight

We call on the Government to develop and implement mandatory national training for all professionals who interact with people who are overweight and obese, to equip them with the skills to sensitively and effectively raise the issue of obesity and weight management. This must address the psychological as well as physiological impact of weight on health and must be underpinned by the understanding that anyone who struggles with their weight should be treated with kindness, care and compassion.

We would like to see the introduction of a training module applicable to all undergraduate and professional studies that addresses 'raising the issue' of weight with compassion and sensitivity, and never with judgement, criticism or humiliation, teaching skills to:

- 1 Recognise when it would be beneficial to raise the issue of weight with people in a sensitive and skilled way.
- 2 Understand the difficulties that people who are overweight or obese face and recognise the need for compassion and care in helping them to address the issue.
- 3 Be familiar with the options of where to signpost for expert advice and support in making healthy lifestyle changes, losing weight and maintaining weight loss.

**Slimming World believes that professionals working in the health sector should have a duty of care to their patients who are at risk of physical or psychological harm as a result of being overweight or obese.**

*NICE recommendations: Guidance published by NICE in May 2014 looks at how lifestyle weight management programmes focusing on diet, activity and the way people live their lives (behaviour change) can help people who are overweight or obese to lose weight and to keep it off.*

## Call 3: Clear guidance on healthy weight management in pregnancy

There is strong evidence of the risks of obesity and excess weight gain in pregnancy and yet there are no UK guidelines on what constitutes a safe weight gain, and many midwives have to refer to American guidance. Research by Slimming World and the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) found that 43% of midwives are not confident about advising women on weight management during pregnancy, and 79% would feel more confident if they had appropriate training.

A quarter of midwives (24.7%) don't have the facilities to weigh pregnant women in all of the settings in which they provide antenatal care. Slimming World and the RCM are calling for clear guidance on healthy weight management in pregnancy and for women and midwives to have the information, support and resources needed.

**Slimming World is calling on government to:**

- Introduce routine weight monitoring at key stages of pregnancy for all women, regardless of starting BMI.
- Introduce clear guidelines on safe and healthy weight gain in pregnancy.

## Call 4: The Government must raise awareness of the calories contained in alcohol by supporting clear labelling on alcoholic drinks

The public needs to be made aware of the calories they are consuming in alcohol so that they can make their own informed choices. We believe that calorie labelling on alcoholic drinks will go some way to addressing this.

Calorie information is not readily available for consumers when drinking alcohol and evidence shows that in reality people rarely seek this information on websites.

Most non-alcoholic food and drink products must display calorie information on the labels yet the European Commission has ruled that alcohol is exempt. This leaves responsibility with the Government to increase pressure on the industry to introduce this more widely.

*A survey of 2,616 Slimming World members – people actively making healthier choices – found that 86% believe adding a calorie count to alcohol labels would be successful in raising awareness of the link between alcohol consumption and obesity.*

## Call 5: Protection for young people and families

In June 2016, Slimming World and the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) invited young people from across the UK to share their views about how the childhood obesity epidemic could be solved and conducted surveys among young people and adults to gain their views on how to tackle childhood obesity. The resulting 'Child's Obesity Strategy' called for a ban on fast food takeaway deliveries to schools and the introduction of new initiatives such as film-style classifications on unhealthy food and a loyalty card to reward healthy food choices, as part of a raft of ideas. Slimming World continues to provide support for families and young people to make healthier choices around food and drink.

In 2019, Slimming World and the RSPH published *Health on the Shelf*, a report that highlighted the pressing need for a transformation to the way supermarkets market to their consumers. The research revealed that a quarter of women believe offers on unhealthy, high calorie food and drinks in supermarkets caused them to gain weight, and one in five UK adults also say supermarkets caused them to go off-track when attempting to lose weight.

### **Slimming World is calling on the Government to take the nation's health seriously by implementing policy and incentives for industry to ensure:**

- Businesses do not train staff to upsell unhealthy, high-calorie food and drink – such as foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) as defined by the nutrient profile model developed by the Foods Standards Agency (FSA).
  - Business rate reductions for supermarkets and retailers who take health seriously by adopting key principles.
  - Businesses provide clear in-store calorie information for all their food and drink products (including alcohol).
  - Businesses should not financially incentivise food and drink that is damaging to the public's health when consumed to excess.
- *50% of those surveyed believe that there are more unhealthy products on supermarket shelves than healthy.*
- *Almost half of respondents (48%) agree legislation should be introduced requiring supermarkets to engage in practices to encourage healthier choices, as more than a third (36%) of them feel they impulse purchase unhealthy products because they are on special offer.*

## References

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