

What is Change4Life?

Change4Life is a new initiative, supported by the Department of Health, bringing together health and education professionals, industry and the third sector with the shared aims to improve children's diets and levels of activity so reducing the threat to their future health and happiness. The goal is to help every family in England eat well, move more and live longer. Many national, regional and local partners – health care professionals, teachers, charities, government agencies, the media, big businesses and community organisations - will help build Change4Life into a movement.

Why do we need Change4Life?

Obesity is a growing problem. Over the last century the food supply has changed beyond recognition; abundant and varied food options are now almost continuously available and at relatively low cost. Sedentary occupations have become the norm, cars have replaced more active forms of transport and society places a high value on labour saving gadgets. Modern life, therefore, means unhealthy behaviours are often the 'easy' option and people need to constantly and actively try not to gain weight.

The link between obesity and preventable illnesses, such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer, is undeniable but research shows that many parents are unaware of the risks to their children and that they tend to underestimate the amount they and their children eat and overestimate the amount of activity the family does. According to recent reports, over a third of children in England are currently overweight or obese.

Research also shows that people will only change their behaviours if they believe that everyone around them is changing too. If families are to change their behaviours around diet and activity they will need the support of those they trust: their doctors, their schools, the supermarkets where they buy their food, the institutions and brands that they trust.

Change4Life aims to inspire a society-wide movement that encourages everyone to make changes to their diet and activity levels. Our focus is on long-term prevention, so in the early stages of the movement we will be targeting families with young children (aged 0-11). Change4Life will reposition the issue of obesity, highlighting to parents the links between poor diet and sedentary lifestyles and preventable illnesses and their responsibility to ensure their children eat better and take regular exercise. It will offer accessible, friendly and encouraging support to implement changes.

How will Change4Life affect me as a health care professional?

We want to inform all health care professionals in England about Change4Life in the lead up to the launch to the public. As part of an integrated marketing plan, an advertising campaign will launch to the public in January 2009.

How Change4Life affects you will depend on what you do – we anticipate different levels of engagement. You may only need to be aware of what Change4Life is, but if you have regular contact with families who either have or are at risk of weight issues you may want to know more, join with Change4Life and have access to resources we are developing for the workforce and for consumers.

We already run healthy living activities to combat obesity, what do we need to do to connect to Change4Life?

Where possible we would like you to align your activity to Change4Life.

Obesity is a complex and sensitive issue to tackle. Change4Life will help to reposition the issue of obesity, highlighting to parents the links between weight and preventable illnesses and their responsibility to ensure their children eat better and take regular exercise. The movement will help to make behaviours around diet and physical activity more high profile and will provide accessible, friendly and encouraging support to implement changes.

In some instances, your alignment to the movement may involve simply adding the Change4Life logo to your existing materials so that they are co-branded; in others, it may involve developing new initiatives where Change4Life (or a sub brand) is more prominent. A set of Change4Life Principles and Guidelines for Government and the NHS will soon be available. The guidelines include instructions on the use of the main Change4Life logo, sub brands (such as walk4life, cook4life and swim4life) and the potential to create a sub brand for your own healthy living initiative.

What about the 5 A Day and other relevant campaigns?

The Change4Life movement will combine with the 5 A Day campaign and other relevant healthy living initiatives. We would like those people running local activities (such as Breastfeeding Cafes, Weight Management Programmes, Toddler Activity Groups, Cooking Classes and Walking Groups) to align and combine with Change4Life, sharing best practice, using new ideas, resources and opportunities to help build a national, recognisable movement.

Why are we using this approach?

Obesity is a global problem. It is a complex issue for which there are no easy answers and, as yet, no country has found a way to solve the rise in obesity.

Extensive and ongoing academic and consumer research (informed by an Expert Review Group of leading academics in the fields of physical activity, nutrition and behavioural psychology) has provided a number of key insights around attitudes and behaviours to obesity, diet and exercise. Key insights around parents and children are that:

- Although parents realise that obesity is a growing problem they do not recognise it is their problem.
- Parents tend to underestimate how much they and their children eat and overestimate the amount of physical activity they do.
- Parents do not make the connection between unhealthy weight status in their children and long-term health problems (such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer).
- A host of 'unhealthy' behaviours have no perceived risks to parents: e.g. sedentary behaviour, snacking levels and portion size.

Using these insights, Change4Life will help to reposition the issue of obesity, highlighting to parents the links between poor diet and sedentary lifestyles and preventable illnesses and their responsibility to ensure their children eat better and take regular exercise. It will create a national movement with a local community feel, involving all areas of society to help encourage changes in attitude and behaviour to diet and exercise.

If you would like to know more about some of the insights behind the Change4Life strategy it is worth reading: The 'Healthy Living' Social Marketing Initiative: A review of the evidence and the Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives Strategy (both are available online, please see links below). We will publish a summary of the consumer research findings soon.

Why is Change4Life working with commercial companies?

Change4Life follows social marketing principles. Social marketing is an adaptable approach, increasingly being used to achieve and sustain behaviour goals on a range of social issues. The National Social Marketing Centre's definition of health-related social marketing is 'the systematic application of marketing, alongside other concepts and techniques, to achieve specific behavioural goals, to improve health and to reduce inequalities.'

At the outset, social marketing is about understanding people's starting point in relation to an issue, in this case unhealthy weight gain. Our key questions are:

- What in their behaviours places them at risk?
- What drives their current behaviour?
- How might they be motivated to change?
- Who might be able to influence them?
- What might act as barriers to change?

Research suggests that many of our behaviours around diet and physical activity are influenced by what people are doing around us, in our home environment, in the media, in supermarkets and stores and at school. Studies in adults indicate that people are very sensitive to social norms for food consumption and use these to judge what they should be eating. Children too want to be accepted and belong to their peer group through their choice of food as much as their choice of clothes and music. In addition, societal changes have resulted in a scenario where physical activity is no longer an integral part of everyday life and sedentary lifestyles are the default for most children and adults. To address this we need to take a whole-society approach to help influence and shift behaviours around diet and physical activity. We recognise that many organisations have influence with and can reach our target audiences in ways that we cannot. Therefore, we will be working with commercial partners to help influence people's behaviour. We will do this by tapping into the power of brand loyalties – working to make changes in food manufacturing, shopping habits, supporting new activity schemes and spreading the word in the press, television and radio.

Before any commercial company can work with us on the Change4Life movement, they must sign up to our Terms of Engagement. The Terms of Engagement ask companies to commit to working with us

on both healthy diet and physical activity initiatives that complement and support the Change4Life objectives.

It is also worth bearing in mind that the Department of Health has £75 million to spend on the Change4Life movement over three years. The commercial sector spends £335 million each year on promoting confectionery, snacks, fast food and sugary drinks. We need to work with these companies if we are to influence their corporate responsibility agendas.

What do we actually want the public to do?

We want parents and children to eat better and move more. We need to influence them to incrementally change their behaviours around food and physical activity.

We recognise that the behaviours we are asking people to change – how they shop, how they cook, how they eat, how they travel, how they play – are not easy. Some of them are hard to do once; all of them are hard to change for life. They will need incentives to change and sustained support as they try to embed those changes in their lives.

Using the findings from the research, we are developing a set of behaviour change goals and messages - such as eating five fruit and veg a day, taking 60 minutes activity a day, cutting back on fatty foods.

What resources are you developing for the public and when will these be available?

We recognise that information alone is not enough so we are currently developing resources for the public. These will include a dedicated helpline number, a website, information packs and a range of useful resources. These will be available from November onwards.

Whom can I contact at a regional level to learn more?

The Regional Obesity Lead in your region is your first point of contact.

Are there any Change4Life resources available for the workforce?

We are currently developing resources for health care professionals. We will make these available in the coming months. Once these resources are available you will be able to download some of them from the Department of Health website. You will also be able to order resources from Prolog.

If you would like more information in the meantime please visit the Obesity section on the Department of Health website. Here you can access a range of existing resources for healthcare professionals, including Care Pathways, NICE guidance, and the National Heart Forum's 'Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: A toolkit for developing local strategies'.

How does this link in with the NCMP?

As part of the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP), parents of children in Reception and Year 6, may routinely be sent their child's results (height, weight and an interpretation) at any time during the 2008/09 academic year. These letters will be sent with a Change4Life leaflet encouraging

them to eat well and move more, with top tips on fun and easy ways to improve the health of their children. For more information about the NCMP in your area or the provision of results to parents, please contact the PCT obesity lead or for general information go to the Healthy Living section on the Department of Health website.

What about the rest of the UK?

We are in dialogue with our colleagues in the Devolved Administrations to align with their own healthy living initiatives.

Links

Change4Life Brand guidelines

www.dh.gov.uk/change4life

The 'Healthy Living' Social Marketing Initiative: A review of the evidence:

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_073044

Policy information, existing guidance on obesity and the Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives Strategy:

www.dh.gov.uk/obesity

Further information about the National Child Measurement Programme:

www.dh.gov.uk/healthyliving

Further information on social marketing:

www.nsms.org.uk