2nd December 2015

Open Letter from 'activematters', highlighting issues with and in response to the House of Commons Health Committee | Childhood obesity — brave and bold action | First Report of Session 2015-2016

Whilst 'activematters' is broadly supportive of the recommendations – the down-playing/muted presence of physical activity throughout is of very serious concern. Furthermore – its omission from the summary of recommendations is cause for alarm.

activematters |These are our specific concerns:

- P3 '…although physical activity has enormous benefits – regardless of weight – encouraging people to increase their physical activity levels alone is unlikely to have an impact on the obesity crisis'
- ***activematters response: We agree that increasing levels of physical activity alone will not solve the problem. However, we have consistently presented an argument for an holistic approach to young children's overall health/well-being in which physical activity plays a significant role***
- P7.'Exercise – or lack of it is thus an important factor – but it would be a mistake to imagine that childhood obesity can be prevented solely by increasing physical activity'
- ***activematters response: We agree with this statement – but would point out that 90% of young children do not experience the daily CMO recommendation of 180 mins daily physical activity – the minimum that would support their smooth overall development – let alone ensure a healthy weight***
- P11. 'We reiterate and endorse the findings of our predecessor's enquiry that exercise has enormous benefits for children's health and well-being irrespective of their weight. We call on government. to increase provision for physical activity in childhood and consider it an important part of the strategy to tackle obesity. We urge the government, however, not to lose sight of the clear evidence that *measures to improve the food environment to reduce calorie intake must lie at the heart of a successful strategy, as these measures are likely to have a greater overall impact on childhood obesity levels'*
- ***activematters response: For <u>all</u> young children – physical activity is of CRITICAL importance in maintaining a healthy weight and promoting a lifelong interest in health/well-being/activity with the positive support and encouragement of parents/carers. If it is really considered 'an important part of the strategy' – let us see a cohesive action plan that would back up this claim***
- P21 – Quote from Jeanelle de Gruchy – assoc. of Directors of Public Health - '…The concern we might have is that, as council budgets are reduced, they will be looking at other ways in which we can improve health and you get this quite conflicting area again of the sponsorship with the branding of particular drinks or food companies linked to kids being physically active'
- ***activematters response: It is a major concern, that whilst the recommendations throughout the Report focus on the limitation of marketing and general intrusion by food companies - there is still no reference as to 'HOW' this is to be achieved***

activematters overall response: Children spend around half their waking hours in school/nursery environments - and consume one third to one half of their calories while in school or settings. As a result, any positive changes made in these environments may have a significant impact on current childhood obesity levels. They may also have a powerful impact on future adult obesity because many overweight or obese children become overweight / obese adults.

In anticipation of the government National Child Obesity Strategy – to be published in January 2016 – the Children's Food Trust calls for the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) to be extended (at present it covers reception and year 6 children) to include universal measurement and reporting at age 2 and during the teenage years. Jamie Oliver has also called for children to be weighed and measured at age 3. Both initiatives are designed to provide data to effect change in levels of child obesity.

BUT – there has to be a plan. Data is of no use at all unless it feeds into a model/system that is of immediate/meaningful/relevant/sustainable support to parents and practitioners. Collecting data for the sake of it – is just a waste of time and resources. Let us not forget that weighing/measuring is not mandatory and parents of overweight/obese children are often those least likely to engage.

'activematters' proposes the creation of an integrated scheme (delivered via settings and primary schools) that co ordinates a range of healthcare professionals and services to offer personalised care and support for children with obesity concerns.

It must be managed at a local/community level and deliver a holistic, accessible and sustainable approach that brings together a multi-disciplinary 'pediatric health team' – that includes GP's, dieticians, psychologists/ physical activity specialists and EY practitioners – providing medical assessments, dietary advice, physical activity opportunities and nursing support.

Children and parents will be empowered to work with community services offering a 'hands on' approach to support them to improve their diet and physical activity levels.

'activematters' acknowledges that the government and its various departments are engaged in a range of initiatives to influence behaviors in early years - with a broad message platform using various frameworks and media campaigns. This is - in our view - only one strand of a complex co ordinated approach that needs to be delivered in settings and schools. Professionals and parents must be supported long-term to embed and maintain the message in order to achieve sustainable outcome(s).

activematters
Dedicated to physical activity for young children
3 Clarendon Cross, London, W11 4AP M: 07920 863 344
E: info@activematters.org www.activematters.org