

The Research 2023



Monday 5th September saw the start of a 3 month research project designed to engage the community, partner organisations and other interested people in the development of a healthy weight strategy. The aim of the research was to understand:

- what being a healthy weight means to members of the public and professionals;
- the actions being taken to manage weight (personally or through local services);
- barriers being faced in reducing weight or levels of obesity;
- available resources and support, and where there are gaps in support.

Two surveys were used to gather views: one for organisations and health professionals and another for members of the public or individuals. In addition to surveys, local groups and partnership boards were encouraged to hold discussion sessions. A full report is available detailing the findings of the research. This document provides a brief summary.

Engagement



278 People were engaged in the research

- 74 stakeholder responses were received, many of those worked in the NHS or for Shropshire Council. Smaller numbers were private and voluntary sector representatives with an interest in healthy weight support.
- 201 survey respondents were members of the public.
- More women participated in the research compared to men (76.1% women, compared to 15.4% men, others preferred not to say).
- Participation in the research was spread across age groups with fewer 18-24 year olds but good representation from all other groups. The analysis highlights that where men participated they were more likely to be in the 65-84 age group.
- Research participants were located across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. There were slightly fewer responses from the South and West compared to the North of the county.

Understanding of healthy weight



- 91% of the public survey respondents strongly agree or agree that they have a good understanding of healthy weight (93% for stakeholder respondents).
- 92% of public survey respondents strongly agree or agree that being a healthy weight is important to them (only 2% disagree).
- Both public respondents and stakeholders highlighted concerns over the use of BMI. Many felt it was not an accurate way of measuring healthy weight.
- Stakeholders were asked whether experience of managing their own weight impacts on confidence/ability to support others. 43% said 'yes', 31% 'no' and 26% were not sure. The comments highlight a fear of being judged as a professional (if weight is a personal challenge) or being perceived as judging others.
- The comments highlight some dissatisfaction with current approaches (although group sessions Weight Watchers/Slimming World receive positive comments).
- 57% of the public survey respondents feel they could successfully manage their weight while 24% disagree and others are not sure. The challenges of longer term weight maintenance are well described.

Early years and child nutrition



- Although all ages were included in the research, a specific focus included early years and child nutrition. 20 of the professional survey respondents described working with children and young people and 28 at all life stages.
- Stakeholders working with parents were asked if they felt confident providing information on the benefits of breastfeeding in pregnancy. 55% agree they are very confident/confident, 14% lack confidence and 20% have a neutral view.
- Few believe pregnant women and early years children are well supported. Comments suggest that additional service capacity is needed in midwifery and health visiting services.
- Of the public survey respondents with children, only 10.5% felt they did not have a good understanding of their child/children's nutritional needs. 58% are confident and others have a neutral view.
- Informal support from others (e.g. family, friends) and support from health professional (e.g. midwife, health visitor, GP) are the main sources of information/support reported by parents for early years nutritional needs.

Barriers and support gaps



Top barriers for healthy diet

- The amount of unhealthy food available to buy.
- Too many opportunities to eat high sugar/fat snacks.
- Having time to prepare healthy food.
- Motivation.

Top barriers for physical activity

- Finding time.
- Having access to local facilities.
- Cost of some activities.

Comments highlighted how hard it can be to lose weight, challenges with motivation/willpower, difficulties maintaining weight loss over time and not having adequate time/energy to focus on weight management.

Stakeholder barriers

Comments support the public response (including limited time) but also cover more points including:

- Challenging choices between cost and nutrition.
- Increasing cost of living and poverty.
- Health system access and pathways for weight (including GP access).
- Child sedentary behaviour (influenced by technology).
- The need for increased resources for health visiting and early years (including breastfeeding support).
- The need to provide specialist support services for obesity and medication related weight gain.
- Food behaviours linked to trauma and mental health support needs.
- The need for support with weight linked to age and disability (including learning disabilities).

Suggestions and next steps



Across the research with members of the public and stakeholders there were a range of suggestions including:

- Inclusivity within healthy weight support to include healthy weight in relation to poverty/income, mental health, physical health (e.g. mobility), learning disabilities, age (differing needs of children/young people, women through menopause, older adults etc.), access to services and more....
- Targeted support for people whose disabilities or health conditions lead to healthy weight challenges.
- Members of the public called for careful consideration of approach (reiterating

concerns about BMI) and highlighting the sensitivities around such a personal issue.

- Many highlighted a need for more specialist and tailored one-to-one support (e.g. advice from dietitians). Some referred to the need for long-term support.
- Suggestions included making the most of existing services and opportunities to integrate healthy weight support into existing ways of working.

All feedback will be used to inform the development of a Healthier Weight Strategy for Shropshire.

