

To: Local Medical Committees England

From: Professor Jonathan Valabhji

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NHS Digital Weight Management Programme

Purpose

This briefing is intended for Local Medical Committees and Primary Care Commissioners. It provides information on early outcomes from the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme and its potential for impacting positively on addressing health inequalities.

Context

1. Obesity is recognised as a multifaceted global health concern associated with reduced life expectancy¹. It is identified as a modifiable risk factor for a number of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders, some cancers, liver disease, respiratory disease, and a range of mental health issues².
2. Studies show that the UK has one of the highest prevalence's of overweight and obesity in Europe, with nearly three in every four men and almost two in every three women expected to be overweight by 2030³.
3. Nearly a quarter of adults in England are living with obesity and rates are increasing. The prevalence and degree of increase are not spread equally across society, with a strong association between obesity and deprivation resulting in an observed increase in prevalence in the most deprived communities⁴.
4. Variation in obesity rates is associated with worse health outcomes for people in more deprived areas and contribute to health inequalities with obesity-related hospital admissions in the most deprived areas of England being almost 2.5 times greater than in the least deprived areas⁵.
5. Obesity creates a significant burden on the NHS. In 2019/20, there were 10,780 hospital admissions in England with a primary diagnosis of obesity and over one million admissions to NHS hospitals in 2019/20 where obesity was a factor (an increase of 17% on 2018/19); this was over twice as likely in the most vs least deprived areas³.

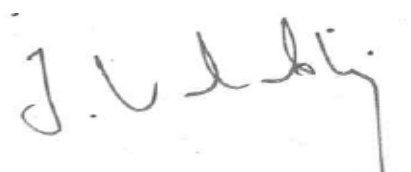
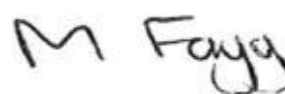
The NHS Digital Weight Management Programme

6. Launched in April 2021, the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme is available for people living with obesity with an existing comorbidity of either diabetes, or hypertension or both, the Programme is accessible via referral from General Practice and Community Pharmacy.
7. Delivered over 12-consecutive weeks, the Programme provides free digitally delivered tier 2 weight management services that can be accessed flexibly through either an app or, where available, a web-based platform, without the need for people to travel to access services.
8. The Programme provides three levels of intervention at varying intensities; Level 1 offers access to digital content only, Level 2 offers access to digital content plus up to 50 minutes of human coaching, and Level 3 offers access to digital content plus up to 100 minutes of human coaching.
9. A dedicated NHS Digital Weight Management Programme Referral Hub, triages individual patient referrals into one of the three levels of intervention. This stratification process aims to ensure those least likely to complete a behavioural programme (those of a younger age, from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, from a more deprived area and male sex) are offered a higher level of intervention and support (Level 2 or Level 3).

Engagement and Outcomes of the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme

10. The Programme has received **over 200,000 total referrals** since its launch in April 2021.
11. In terms of inequalities, approximately **50% of total referrals are from the two most deprived socioeconomic quintiles** with around 35% of primary care referrals being from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds (compared with 18.3% of the England population identifying as being of non-white ethnicity in the 2021 census data), indicating services are being targeted to where they are most needed, reaching those at higher risk of adverse outcomes associated with living with obesity.
12. The Programme is available to all General Practices to refer into. It is funded directly by NHS England and there is no cost to the local health system. Additionally, GPs are entitled to **£11.50 per referral** under the Enhanced Service Specification for weight management 2023/24 incentive scheme [NHSE: Enhanced Service Specification Weight Management 2023-24](#)
13. To maximise of the available financial resources, it is essential the Programme reaches the right patients. Adults who satisfy each of the following criteria are eligible for a referral into the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme from General Practice:
 - BMI $\geq 27.5\text{kg/m}^2$ except for people of White ethnicity in whom it is adjusted to $\geq 30\text{kg/m}^2$ and
 - Diagnosis of diabetes (type 1 or type 2) or hypertension or both
14. Referrals for patients who do not meet the eligibility criteria cannot be accepted and are returned to the referring practice.
15. We plan to publish details of outcomes from the first year of the programme during 2023. Provisional analysis demonstrates a reported **average weight loss of between 3 and 4kg** for participants who complete the digital Programme, which is comparable with published evidence from other tier 2 weight management services.
16. Further information on NHS Digital Weight Management Programme and how to initiate the referral process for eligible patients is accessible here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/digital-weight-management/>

With kind regards,

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¹ Adapted from Prospective Studies Collaboration. Body-mass index and cause-specific mortality in 900,000 adults: collaborative analyses of 57 prospective studies. Lancet. 2009;373(9669):1083–109

² Obesity and overweight (2021) World Health Organization. World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>.

³ NHS Digital (2021) Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet, England 2021. Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-obesity-physical-activity-and-diet/england-2021>

⁴ NHS Digital (2022) Health Survey for England, 2021 part 1, NHS choices. NHS. Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/health-survey-for-england/2021>

⁵ Ministry of Housing, C. & L.G. (2019) English indices of deprivation 2019, GOV.UK. GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>