

Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group on Cancer

Wednesday 17 March 2021, 17:30-18:30

(Virtual meeting via Zoom)

1. Welcome

Miles Briggs MSP (Chair) opened the meeting and welcomed members.

The Chair briefly described the meeting agenda and etiquette.

Members were asked to raise any changes to the minutes of the previous meeting before approval.

2. Scottish Obesity Alliance – obesity and cancer prevention

The Chair noted that the CPG has recently discussed the impact of COVID-19 on people affected by cancer and the Scottish Government's national cancer recovery plan, which contains actions to improve cancer services from the point of detection and diagnosis onwards. We also know that 4 in 10 cancers could be prevented with more effective action on public health. The Scottish Government published its healthy weight action plan in Scotland. Excess weight is currently the second biggest preventable cause of cancer after smoking.

The Chair welcomed Professor Shona Hilton (Interim Chair, Scottish Obesity Alliance) and Lorraine Tulloch (Programme Lead, Obesity Action Scotland) and invited SH to begin presenting.

SH noted that the Scottish Obesity Alliance (SOA) launched its manifesto on 4 March and that the presentation would consider the role of obesity in Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) – cancer, heart disease, stroke, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes – and how this contributes to health inequalities.

The work of Prof Nick Freudenberg details how NCDs have surged but can be prevented by regulating the commercial determinants of health. This has been described as an 'industrial epidemic' that also includes tobacco and alcohol as risk factors.

Before COVID, NCDs accounted for 69% of deaths in Scotland. A recent study published in the Lancet showed that 1 in 5 people worldwide are at an increased risk of severe COVID, mostly due to underlying NCDs. In Scotland, 2 in 3 adults aged 16-75 have overweight or obesity – 29% have clinical obesity. The Scottish Health Survey 2020 edition found that 39% of adults report that their weight increased after the start of lockdown in March 2020. Women were more likely than men to report increased weight. There are many types of cancer linked to being overweight or obese.

The Scottish Government's healthy weight plan includes a commitment to halve childhood obesity by 2030, but this is not on track to be achieved. Since the commitment was announced, over 18,000 more children have fallen into the 'at risk of obesity' category.

SH detailed aspects of the SOA manifesto and explained that the SOA is open to new members and the evidence shows that now is a very important time to join and take action. SOA is seeking restrictions of advertising and marketing on unhealthy food and drink products, particularly to children and planning for a healthy-weight environment.

Action is needed to 'build back better' after COVID-19. This includes the media and decision-makers working together to align messages to the public, which has been effective in related policy areas of

minimum unit pricing for alcohol and the soft drinks industry levy. An effective way to reduce NCDs is to implement policies targeted at 'upstream' such as restricting marketing, increasing price and controlling availability of products. Research has found current restrictions have been effective in reducing advertising of unhealthy food & drink around schools, but children living in more deprived areas are more likely to see such advertising. The implementation of policy and regulatory measures in Scotland have stalled during the pandemic, although there is a greater need now to see progress on measures that have been committed to.

The Chair thanked SH for the presentation and invited LT for additional remarks. LT noted that the healthy weight action plan contains the right commitments on obesity, but the current challenge is on implementation of measures to achieve a healthier food environment. Making progress on these will be the starting point, but other policies will also be needed in future to tackle the problem.

Roseann Haig from Circle of Comfort asked how CPG members can join the SOA. SH explained that there aren't joining criteria but encouraged anyone interested to contact the Alliance. LT added that members are required to make a declaration of interests (e.g. links to industry) and agree to the SOA's principles. Full memberships and Associate Memberships are available. The Chair noted that further information on the SOA can be circulated to CPG members.

The Chair asked whether health research has been undertaken on physical activity during the pandemic. SH said that a wide range of behavioural research will be underway now and the outputs of these studies will come later.

Annie Anderson noted that impact of the pandemic on obesity services has not been prioritised and it is important for weight management services to be restarted. As well as targeting childhood obesity, supporting adults to lose weight can reduce cancer risk. LT added that it is unfortunate that we have a clear ambition for children in Scotland but not for adults and noted the importance of keeping a population-level focus.

Christine Campbell from NHS Lanarkshire noted that the New Lanarkshire weight management service was due to commence around the time the pandemic started. One of the biggest challenges has been creating the virtual links, but progress is now underway for this service and cancer dietetics.

The Chair noted that some retailers have stopped 'buy one get one free' deals and asked whether this has had a positive impact. LT explained that this has varied by supermarket and that other types of promotion such as temporary price reductions which have an impact on what people buy. Voluntary agreements to limit promotions have not worked in the past and supermarkets need regulation or will continue to offer better deals than competitors.

AA asked about NCD control by targeting availability of unhealthy foods like sweets (as has been implemented for alcohol and tobacco) and the need to change the culture around things like complimentary bowls of sweets at events. SH suggested that focusing on childhood health could be effective, as with smoking in cars, to promote the rights of children to a healthy food environment. Public perception is a challenge – need to make sure that any proposed legislation or measures will be acceptable.

The Chair asked about research on people's behaviour around low-sugar versions of products. SH suggested efforts to nudge people towards healthier alternatives could be considered, but that legislation to restrict price promotions on high sugar foods is the best way to start tackling the problem.

The Chair thanked the speakers from SOA for presenting and taking questions.

3. CPG on Cancer – achievements in this parliamentary session

The Chair said the CPG on Cancer had looked at a range of vital issues over the past five years, with input from people affected by cancer, healthcare professionals, third sector organisations and many more. Its work has included running an inquiry on the implementation of the Scottish Government's cancer strategy, priorities for the future of cancer services and research, and the impact of COVID-19. In previous years the group has also come together with the wider cancer community in hosting the Scottish Cancer Conference, which sadly could not take place in 2020.

On behalf of the Co-Convenors, the Chair thanked members for their contributions to the CPG. Before the pandemic, welcome progress was being made in Scotland's cancer services and the negative impact of NHS services not fully functioning during the past year is deeply concerning. Everyone in the sector will be aware of the impact this will have on cancer outcomes. There is political consensus that the next Parliament needs to focus on re-establishing cancer services and get back on track with cancer outcomes and the inequalities exposed during the pandemic.

Members were invited to offer views on the work of the CPG, which the Chair noted could be shared via email.

Kirsty Slack from Cancer Research UK thanked the co-convenors for their contribution to the CPG during this parliamentary session.

4. Close

Attendance

Abbvie	Macmillan Cancer Support
AstraZeneca	Maggie's
Beatson Cancer Charity	MASScot
Bowel Cancer UK	Myeloma UK
Breast Cancer Prevention Scotland	NHS Lothian
Bristol Myers Squibb	Novartis
British Dietitians Association	Obesity Action Scotland
Cancer Policy Team (Scottish Government)	OCHRE
Cancer Research UK	Orchid
CANDU	Pancreatic Cancer Action
Circle of Comfort	Pancreatic Cancer UK
Clan Cancer Support	REAL Digital International
Edinburgh Cancer Research Centre	Roche
Exact Sciences	Roy Castle Lung Foundation
Gilead	Royal College of Occupational Therapists
Healthandcare.scot	Jane MacDonald
Healthcare Improvement Scotland	Stella Macpherson
Healthcare Public Affairs	
Ipsen	
Janssen	
Kidney Cancer Support Network	
Kyowa Kirwin	
Less Survivable Cancers Taskforce	