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Overview of objectives and methodology

Awareness of obesity

Awareness of Government efforts to tackle obesity

Acceptance of efforts to tackle obesity

Implications for Public Health England
Public Health England (PHE) has been tasked with delivering significant parts of the government’s childhood obesity plan. This includes working with the food and drink industry to make their products healthier. Since the childhood obesity plan was published, retailers and manufacturers have announced they are, or already have, lowered the amount of sugar in their products. As outlined in the childhood obesity plan, PHE is now extending this work to reduce the calories people consume overall, not just those from sugar. PHE will publish its evidence package on calorie consumption among children in early 2018 and set guidelines for the programme later in the year.

Objectives and methodology

Objectives

- Explore the public’s perceptions and awareness of PHE’s calorie reduction programmes
- To inform communications activity and evaluation

Methodology

- Online panel quota survey
- Fieldwork took place from 22nd – 30th January 2018
- 1,000 completed surveys

Sample

- Representative of UK population aged 15-75
- Quotas set:
  - Age by gender
  - Region
  - Working status
- Data weighted by age, gender, working status

This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for market research, ISO 20252:2012 and with the Ipsos MORI Terms and Conditions.
Awareness of obesity
Over nine in ten think obesity is a problem in the UK

Today nearly a third of children aged 2 to 15 are overweight or obese (1) and younger generations are becoming obese at earlier ages and staying obese for longer (2). As stated by Public Health England, obese adults are seven times more likely to become a type 2 diabetic than adults of a healthy weight, which may cause blindness or limb amputation (3).

Thinking about obesity in the UK, how big a problem, if at all, do you think it is nowadays?

93% of the public believe obesity is a problem in the UK, with 43% thinking it is a very big problem and 51% thinking it is a fairly big problem.

This high level of concern is similar across many demographic groups within the population. However, those who have seen something from the Government about calorie reduction are more likely to think obesity is a problem (96%) than those who have not seen anything (92%). This suggests participants who have seen information from the Government are more likely to recognise obesity as problematic, or that being concerned about obesity means these individuals are more likely to notice government activities concerning it.

Those who have not seen anything from the Government about calorie reduction...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% A very big problem</th>
<th>% A fairly big problem</th>
<th>% Not a very big problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>55</td>
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</table>

Those who have seen something from the Government about calorie reduction...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% A very big problem</th>
<th>% A fairly big problem</th>
<th>% Not a very big problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ipsos MORI

Base: All participants (1000) online 15-75, 22-30 January 2018
However, obesity is more of a concern for the population as a whole than for people personally.

Obesity ranks as one of the top 3 health concerns for the UK alongside cancer and mental health. However, people are less likely to identify obesity as being a personal health issue, being much more likely to talk about stress and cancer as threats to their own health. Even among individuals who claim to be overweight, only a third name obesity as a personal health concern (33%).

Which of the following, if any, are your 3-4 biggest concerns about the health of the UK population?

Which of the following, if any, are your 3-4 biggest concerns about your own health?

However, obesity is more of a concern for the population as a whole than for people personally. Obesity ranks as one of the top 3 health concerns for the UK alongside cancer and mental health. However, people are less likely to identify obesity as being a personal health issue, being much more likely to talk about stress and cancer as threats to their own health. Even among individuals who claim to be overweight, only a third name obesity as a personal health concern (33%).
Most participants recognise that eating unhealthily has a negative impact on the NHS

The economic costs of obesity are great, it was estimated that the NHS in England spent £5.1 billion on overweight and obesity-related ill-health in 2014/15(4). Public perception aligns with the facts.

If individuals eat unhealthily, what impact, if any, do you think this has on the NHS?

79% of people think individuals eating unhealthily has a negative impact on the NHS (with 62% thinking the negative impact is large)

Those who have heard something from the Government about calorie reduction are more likely to think the impact of obesity on the NHS is negative (85%) compared to those who have not (74%). Awareness of government activity in relation to obesity may therefore be linked to an understanding of the negative impact it has on the NHS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Large positive impact</th>
<th>% A small positive impact</th>
<th>% A small negative impact</th>
<th>% A large negative impact</th>
<th>% No impact at all</th>
<th>% Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All participants (1000) online 15-75, 22-30 January 2018

Source: Ipsos MORI
Awareness of Government efforts to tackle obesity
There is some recognition of the government’s activities in relation to obesity, with half recalling seeing something about calorie reduction (47%), and a third being aware specifically of the phrase, ‘Look for 100 calorie snacks, two a day max’ (32%).

Before today, had you seen or heard anything from the government about helping people to reduce the number of calories they eat and drink?

However, awareness that the government is working with the food industry is not yet widespread – while half say they know at least a fair amount (51%), one in ten know nothing about it and 39% say they don’t know much about the government’s activities in this area.

The government is currently working with the food industry to make food healthier by reducing the sugar and calories found in products. Before today, how much, if anything, did you know about this?

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Base: All participants (1000) online 15-75, 22-30 January 2018

Source: Ipsos MORI
The majority think the government does too little to tackle obesity

Would you say the government does too much, too little, or the right amount to tackle obesity?

60% of people think the Government does too little to tackle obesity. Only eight per cent say the Government is doing too much, a quarter (25%) think the government is doing ‘about the right amount’.

But they think individuals and families have most responsibility for tackling obesity

How much responsibility, if any, do you think each of the following has in tackling obesity?

- Great deal / fair amount
- Not very much / not at all
- Don’t Know

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Great deal / fair amount</th>
<th>Not very much / not at all</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals and families</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the public do place responsibility with the government for tackling obesity (72%) though they give greater responsibility to individuals and families (90%) and to industry (80%). Responsibility does not seem to sit with employers with only 42% saying they have a responsibility to tackle obesity.

Base: All participants (1000) online 15-75, 22-30 January 2018

Source: Ipsos MORI
Acceptance of efforts to tackle obesity
The majority of the public think the government has a responsibility to work with the food industry

Encouragingly, three quarters think the government has a responsibility to work with the food industry to make food healthier (76%), suggesting that the current calorie reduction programmes will be accepted by the majority of the public. In fact, the public believe the government has a greater responsibility to work with the food industry than it does to work with employers in supporting healthier lifestyles.

**How much responsibility, if any, do you think the government has to address the following health issues?**

- Providing vaccines to prevent infectious diseases
  - % Great deal / fair amount: 87
  - % Not very much / not at all: 9
  - % Don’t Know: 4

- Promoting awareness of how to prevent health conditions such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes
  - % Great deal / fair amount: 85
  - % Not very much / not at all: 12
  - % Don’t Know: 3

- Working with the food industry to make food healthier
  - % Great deal / fair amount: 76
  - % Not very much / not at all: 20
  - % Don’t Know: 4

- Encouraging people to have healthier lifestyles
  - % Great deal / fair amount: 75
  - % Not very much / not at all: 21
  - % Don’t Know: 4

- Supporting employers to help their employees lead healthier lives
  - % Great deal / fair amount: 59
  - % Not very much / not at all: 35
  - % Don’t Know: 6

Source: Ipsos MORI

Base: All participants (1000) online 15-75, 22-30 January 2018
Most support the government working with industry and think regulations to reduce sugar are needed

**To what extent do you support or oppose the government working with the food industry?**

87% of people support the government working with the food industry (51% strongly support and 36% somewhat support). A small minority (eight per cent) oppose government working with the food industry.

Participants were asked to comment on why they supported or opposed the government working in collaboration with the food industry. Supporters of the government’s initiatives to work more closely with the food industry say that collaboration is needed due to a necessity to reduce sugar (12%), reducing sugar intake and obesity to help the NHS financially (11%), and morally it being the right thing to do (10%).

**Why do you support government working with the food industry?**

- Regulations are needed to reduce sugar: 12%
- Will help the NHS: 11%
- It’s the right thing to do: 10%
- Healthier / happy people: 10%
- Stopping obesity: 9%
- Government has influence and power: 8%
- Food industry won’t do it on their own: 7%
- People don’t make the right choices: 7%
- Awareness / information / education: 6%
- Health should be more important than profit: 5%

Base: Those who support the government working with the food industry (872) online 15-75, 22-30 January 2018

Source: Ipsos MORI
Making healthier products cheaper than less healthy ones is considered the most acceptable intervention

The public’s acceptance of different interventions designed to reduce calorie intake is predominantly shaped by cost. By far the most acceptable intervention is making healthier products cheaper than less healthy ones. Conversely, the public consider it to be the least acceptable for unhealthy products to be reduced in size yet the cost to remain the same. Reducing the size of products is not a popular option even if product prices are reduced, with this being the second least acceptable intervention to the public.

Please select which one or two of the following are most / least acceptable to you

**Most acceptable**

1. Making healthier products cheaper than less healthy ones  
   - 70%
2. Changing the ingredients in food gradually so people don’t notice a change in taste  
   - 27%
3. Replacing unhealthy products near the check-outs with healthier ones  
   - 26%

**Least acceptable**

1. Reducing the size of unhealthy products and keeping the same price  
   - 53%
2. Reducing the size of unhealthy products and reducing the price  
   - 31%
3. Changing the ingredients in food to reduce the calories or amount of sugar, though this may change the taste of the product  
   - 29%

Base: All participants (1000) online 15-75, 22-30 January 2018

Source: Ipsos MORI
There is strong support for manufacturers, supermarkets and food outlets making healthier products cheaper

There is very little difference in how the public views different interventions depending on whether these are implemented by manufacturers, supermarkets or food outlets. Over 9 in 10 (91%) support manufacturers making healthier products cheaper than less healthy ones. Almost 8 in 10 (78%) support changing the ingredients in food gradually so people don’t notice a change in taste (78%) or support changing the ingredients to reduce caloric and sugar intake although it may alter the taste of the product (77%). The same sentiments seen in relation to manufacturers can be seen towards supermarkets – 91% support making healthier products cheaper than less healthy ones and 87% support replacing unhealthy products near the checkouts with healthier ones. Similar proportions support food outlets making healthier products cheaper than less healthy ones (89%), while almost 9 in 10 (85%) support replacing unhealthy products near the check-outs.

To what extent do you support or oppose manufacturers, supermarkets or food outlets making healthier products cheaper than less healthy ones?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Strongly / somewhat support</th>
<th>% Strongly / somewhat oppose</th>
<th>% Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supermarkets</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturers</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food outlets</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All participants (1000) online 15-75, 22-30 January 2018

Source: Ipsos MORI
Implications for Public Health England
Implications for PHE

**Obesity is not personal**
- The public recognise obesity to be a problem facing the UK
- But there is less recognition of it being a threat to individual health
- PHE could do more to strengthen perceptions of the personal threat of obesity to individuals and their families

**There is strong support**
- High level of support for government to work with industry to make food healthier
- Public bestow the government with a high level of responsibility for tackling obesity, albeit less so than for individuals or industry
- Predominant view is that the government does too little at present to address the issue

**Cost is important**
- The public hold clear views on the interventions which are more and less acceptable to them
- Making healthy products cheaper than less healthy counterparts is by far the most acceptable intervention.
- Reducing the size of unhealthy products is least acceptable

Source: Ipsos MORI