

Living Well: our new approach in our region

How our environment shapes what we eat, how we move and what we can do about it



In 2015 the Welsh Government brought in a radical piece of legislation. The vision of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act is to create a Wales that we all want to live in now, and in the future.



The sustainable development principle at the heart of the Act recognises that the actions we take today must not compromise the quality of life of those

who come after us. By bringing people together in collaborative action it aims to improve the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of Wales through seven wellbeing goals.

One of these goals is 'A Healthier Wales'. Almost every aspect of our lives shapes our health. Whether that is our jobs, homes, access to education or whether we are experiencing poverty. Our local neighbourhoods also shape our health - from the opportunities for social connection to green space and clean air. These factors combined are what we call the building blocks of health.

While access to health and social care impacts our health and wellbeing, these building blocks have a far stronger impact. The other wellbeing goals aim to bring about a prosperous, resilient, more equal, culturally vibrant, globally responsible Wales of cohesive



communities. They are all impacted by these important building blocks for health and wellbeing for everyone. Getting these foundations right for health - right from the start - is vital for children now and in the future to develop into young people and adults that will thrive in tomorrow's world.

One of the key issues affecting our health as a population right now is excess weight and obesity. **Only a third of adults in Hywel Dda and Swansea Bay are a healthy weight. Three in 10 of our children now start school living with excess weight.** (See Appendix 1 for local data.)



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Excess weight and diet-related ill-health shorten lives and lead to more years of life lived in poor health and with disability so it is important we act now to address the issue and its causes.

Over the past five decades society has radically changed with major shifts in work patterns, transport, food production and sales. What we eat has changed. Foods that are often high in sugar, fat and salt are appealing to us in taste and, for people with less time, are convenient too. The more we use convenience foods, the more our cooking

skills decline and the greater the demand for them. Consuming more of these foods, especially outside the home, contributes to excess weight and conditions such as diabetes and heart disease - now recognised as diet-related ill health. Alongside this we move less - travelling by car more often and in the type of work we do. It's not that we have less willpower than previous generations but many influences on our behaviour are outside of our control.

People living in the most deprived parts of our communities face even greater barriers to accessing affordable, nutritious food and to being active. There are fewer green spaces and safe places to play and generally a higher number of takeaways. If you are on a low income or government benefits, you spend a greater proportion of your money on food, and healthier food, particularly fresh fruit and vegetables, are more expensive. In recent years, those in our poorest communities have seen the most significant increases in excess weight, contributing to a widening health gap between the richest and poorest parts of society.



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We have got to where we are now over decades and change will take time, but the longer we postpone it, the harder it

becomes and the greater the consequences on health and wellbeing will be. We also know that there is no single solution. With many elements feeding into the complex system that shapes people's opportunities and behaviours, there are many ways in which we can intervene to benefit us all. We can act now to improve children's health by increasing the availability of affordable, nutritious food in every school and neighbourhood and creating more safe spaces for children to run and play. We can make it easier for people to walk and cycle and make these a viable way of getting around. We can influence the collective buying power of public sector organisations to ensure that local, nutritious food is available in our schools, workplaces, hospitals, and care homes and make sure everyone has access to nutritious food in their local community. We can influence planning policy to reduce fast food outlets near schools. Some change can only be made by national governments through legislation, like the successful 'sugar tax' (Soft Drinks Industry Levy) but change needs to happen at all levels - national, regional, and local.



Actions to promote healthy weight at a local level do not just benefit people's health. Delivering a more health-promoting and vibrant neighbourhood can contribute to issues like reducing

litter, improving the environment, and supporting local businesses and workforces. Maintaining a healthier local workforce may also have positive impacts on other longer term local goals including employability and productivity of local communities. Changes to the food system can help us reduce our carbon emissions, promote sustainability as well as increase the availability and affordability of nutritious food.

The Whole System Approach to a Healthy Weight

As a key part of their Healthy Weight Healthy Wales strategy, the Welsh Government introduced national and local teams under their 'Leadership and Enabling Change' theme to take a Whole Systems Approach to healthy weight (See Appendix 2 for further information).

The teams bring together organisations and communities in the local area to understand how the local environment shapes people's opportunities to maintain a healthy weight. This goes beyond traditional partnership working. It means looking at the complex interaction of all the various parts of the system - from food sourcing and distribution to local planning decisions to transport options.

Interventions that support individuals to change their behaviour have a role to play in an overall approach but in the absence of wider work to address the structural and environmental causes of excess weight, will have limited effectiveness. A further difficulty with taking only this approach is that if behaviour change is only achievable by those who have the means and self-efficacy, it can risk widening health

inequalities. Whilst there are many small-scale research studies that target individuals and their behaviours, these have not shown evidence of meaningful impact at a population level. Interventions that have multiple components or that provoke change at a system level are harder to evaluate, so the evidence is thinner on the ground. However, policy change such as the sugar levy in England has demonstrated reduced calorie intake at a population level.

Given the complexity of the challenge, approaches to promote healthy weight now focus on whole systems. It is likely that we will need to innovate and to intervene at a higher level in the system to make the biggest difference. The Whole System Approach encourages people to think and work differently, to step outside their own roles, remits, and organisations to see the system as a whole. By understanding how it operates, where the greatest opportunities for change may be and recognising our part in it, can we agree collectively how we need to work and act differently to create a healthy weight environment.

Our small team is working now to bring together partners with a role and interest, including the Regional Partnership Boards, Public Service Boards, Local Authorities, the Third Sector, and communities to do this. There are many people already contributing to the goal of 'A Healthier Wales' and a healthy weight environment, though you may not realise it! Identifying what is already working, the valuable assets we have and making them part of our local solution, are crucial ingredients of the way forward.

We are all working hard to make a difference, but the bigger difference will only become a reality if we focus on where we want to be and align our joint efforts towards that shared goal.

Some of you took part in one of our Participatory System Mapping workshops in early Spring 2023 where we built a shared understanding of the causes of excess weight and our local system.



We now want to bring together a network of stakeholders who will agree on an area of focus from within those maps and then decide how best to align strategy, policy, and action to bring about sustainable long-term change in our local healthy weight environment for all. Please join us.

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Appendix 1

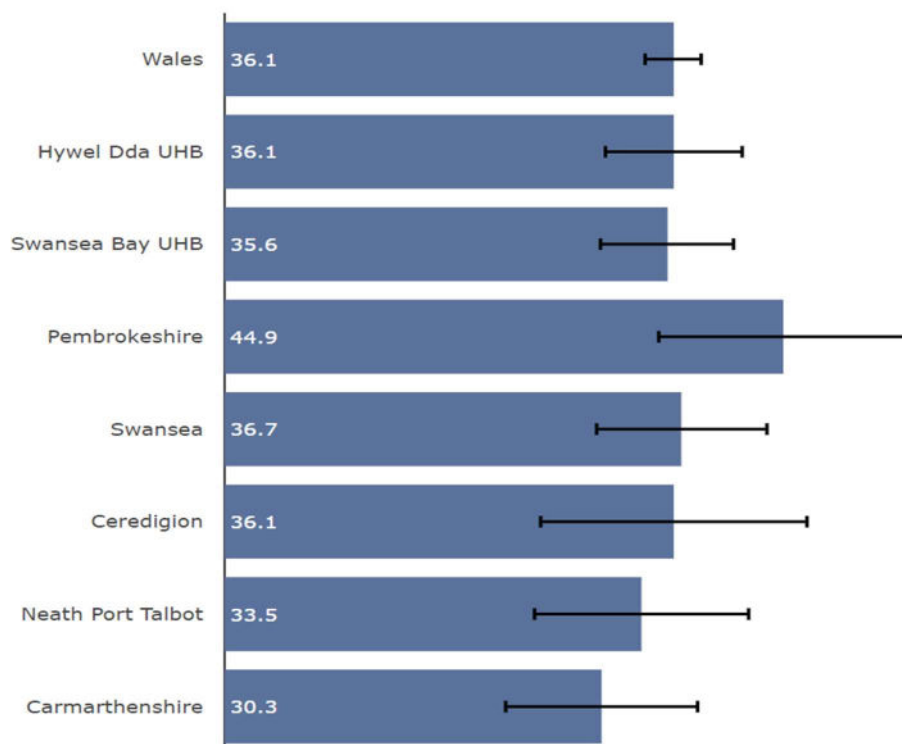
Local Data relating to Healthy Weight by Health Board

The Public Health Outcomes Framework sets out a shared understanding of the health outcomes that are important to the people of Wales. It is linked to the Wellbeing of Future Generations National Milestones and Indicators. A series of indicators, linked to healthy weight, have been chosen to keep track on how we are doing across Wales and locally. These are:

- Working Age Adults of Healthy Weight
- Adults eating 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day
- Adults (16+) who meet the physical activity guidelines

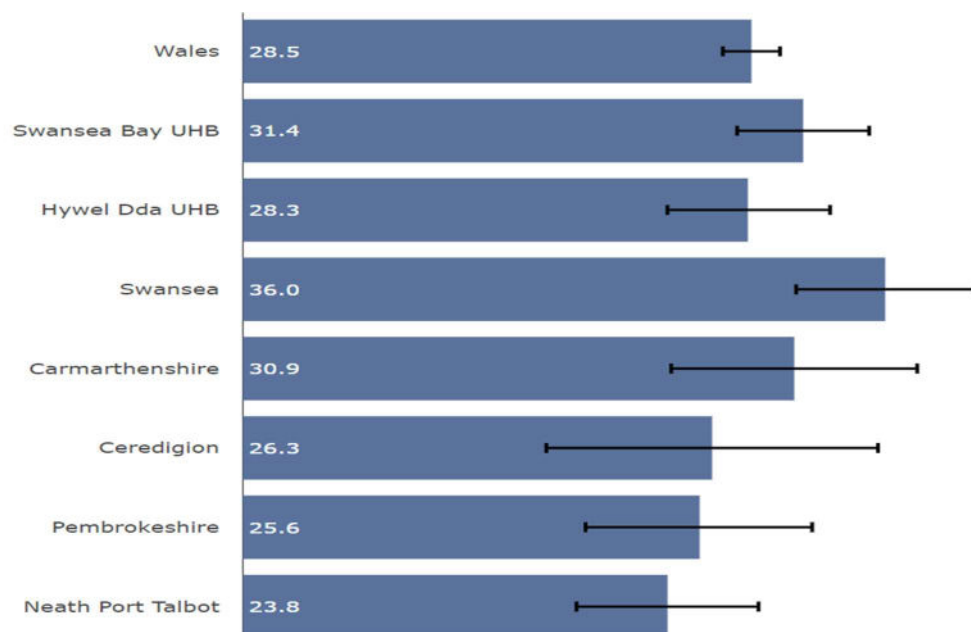
The latest results are shown in the graphs below.

Working age adults of healthy weight, age-specific percentage, aged 16-64, Wales, Health Board and Local Authority, 2022/2023



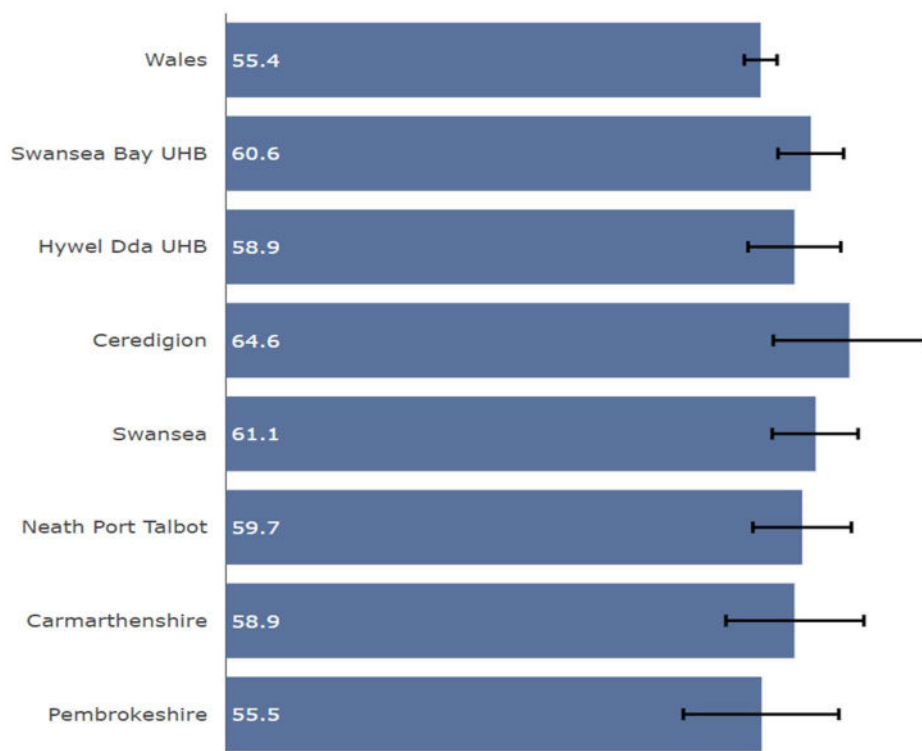
Source: Public Health Wales Observatory, Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF) 2023

Adults eating five or more portions of fruit or vegetables a day, age standardised percentage, 2022/2023



Source: Public Health Wales Observatory, PHOF 2023

Adults (16+) who meet the physical activity guidelines, age standardised percentage, Wales, Health Board, Local Authority, 2022/23



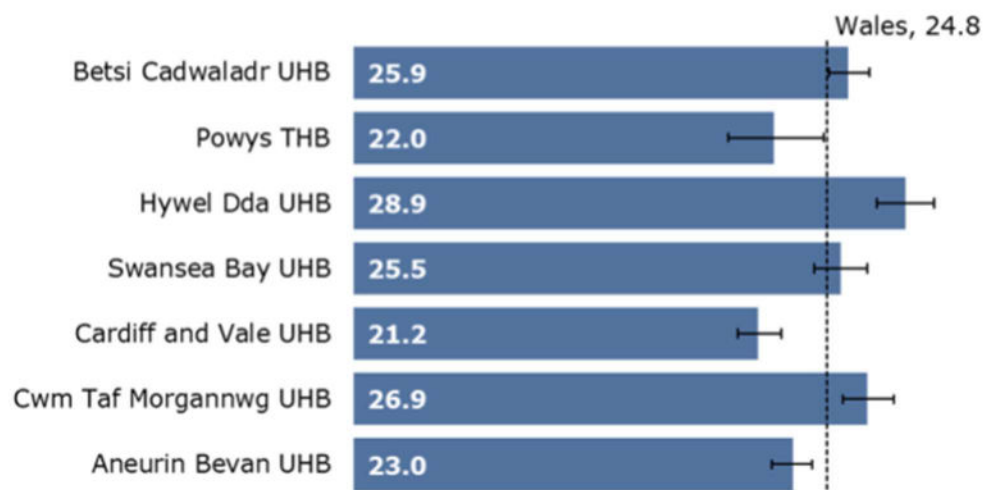
Source: Public Health Wales Observatory, PHOF 2023

The Child Measurement Programme for Wales measures the height and weight of children in Reception Class.

**Percentage of children aged 4 to 5 years with overweight or obesity,
Child Measurement Programme, Wales and health boards, 2022/23**

Produced by Public Health Wales, using CMP data (DHCW)

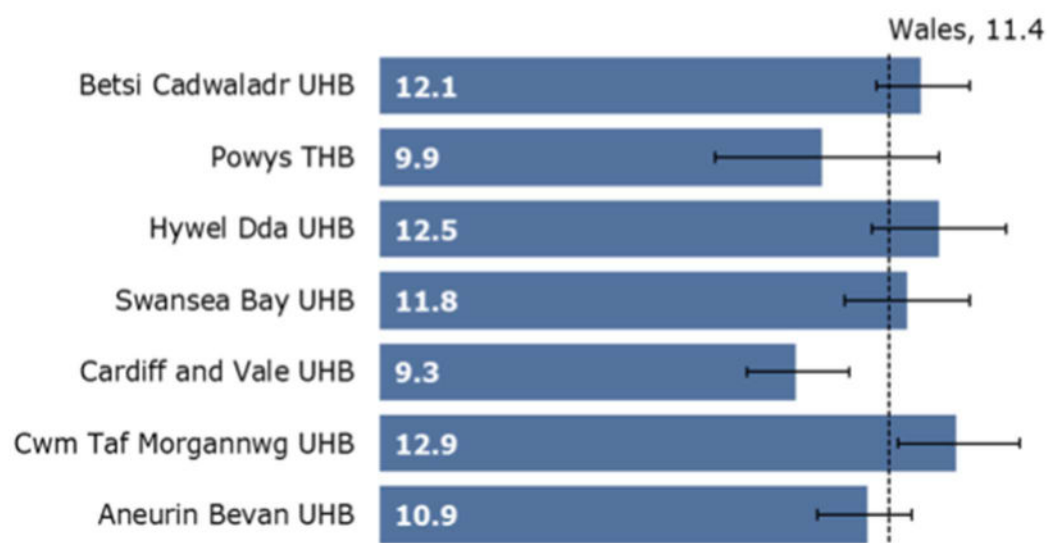
— 95% confidence interval



**Percentage of children aged 4 to 5 years with obesity,
Child Measurement Programme, Wales and health boards, 2022/23**

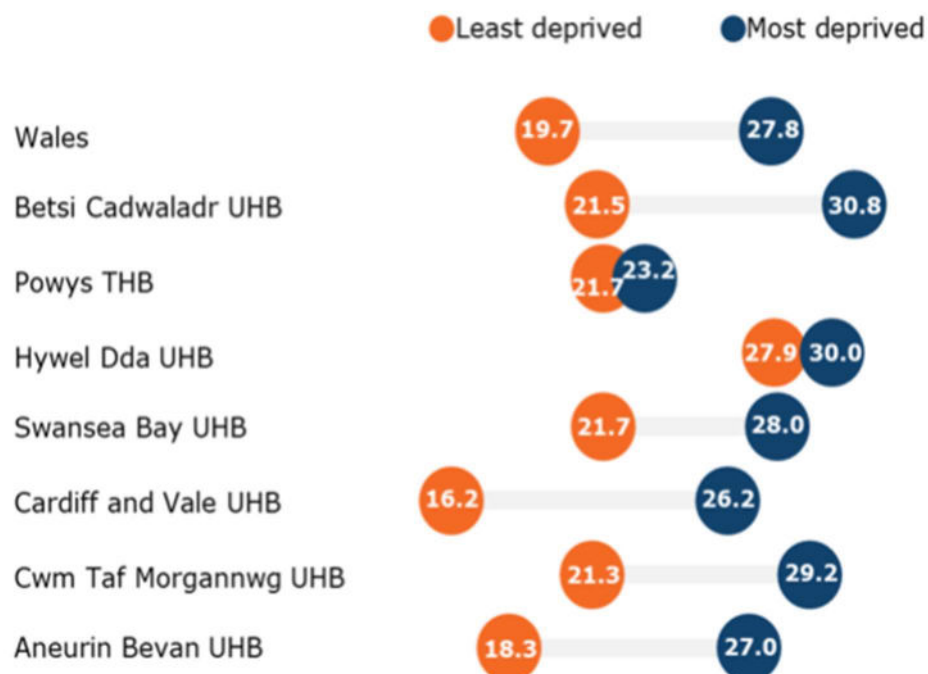
Produced by Public Health Wales, using CMP data (DHCW)

— 95% confidence interval



Percentage of children with overweight or obesity, difference between most and least deprived areas within Wales and health boards, all children, 2022/23

Produced by Public Health Wales, using CMP (DHCW) and WIMD 2019 (WG)



Appendix 2

The Whole Systems Approach to Healthy Weight

A **Whole Systems Approach (WSA)** to promote a healthy weight environment across our region is underway. It is a core component of 'Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales' (2019) - the Welsh Government's long-term strategy to prevent and reduce obesity.

In 2019 the Welsh Government published their long-term strategy to prevent and reduce obesity in Wales - 'Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales'. The strategy recognises that the causes of excess weight in the population are multiple, inter-related and form a complex system and that action targeted to support individual behaviour change, though important has limited impact in changing levels of excess weight at a population level.



The national Whole Systems Approach to Healthy Weight Programme addresses part of this complexity through a focus on an envisioned healthy weight environment. Using an approach that brings people together to understand the system that influences and constrains people's opportunities to be a healthy weight, and then to collaborate for local action, the WSA will deliver key components of the strategy.

A national team within Public Health Wales provides oversight and develops evidence-based approaches and small teams are based within Public Health

Teams/Directorates at each University Health Board across Wales. Our dedicated regional team - a Principal Public Health Practitioner, two part-time Senior Public Health Practitioners and a Project Support Officer - provides local leadership across Hywel Dda and Swansea Bay Health Board areas to enable change. We facilitate the Whole System work across stakeholders and partners following a 9-Step process agreed nationally.

The national team has produced a 2-minute animated video to explain the Whole System Approach to Healthy Weight.

[Healthy Weight Healthy Wales \(youtube.com\)](#)