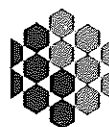


FROM THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY
Edwin Poots MLA



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Mr Daithi McKay MLA
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Our Ref: AGY/330/2014

Date: 27 May 2014

Dear Mr McKay

PROPOSED PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILL - MAKING AMATEUR SPORTS CLUBS EXEMPT FROM RATES

Thank you for your letter of 12 May 2014. I believe the opportunity to take part in all forms of physical activity can do much to help improve an individual's health and wellbeing, and contribute to a healthy population.

Physical Activity is widely recognised as being an important element of a healthy lifestyle. People who are physically active have a lower risk of non-communicable diseases such as obesity, CHD, stroke, some cancers and mental health problems which is why increasing the percentage of people meeting the CMO guidelines on physical activity is a key objective within my Department's 10 year strategic Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in NI - A Fitter Future for All.

There are numerous studies concerning the health impact of physical inactivity and the potential for significant long term risks to health of sedentary behaviour. From doubling health risks, to adding a disease burden to society that rivals smoking, the implications of an inactive lifestyle are well known. In disease prevention terms, it is important to note that even low levels of physical activity can reduce the risk of ill health, and major gains in terms of reduced mortality and morbidity are possible by raising even slightly the activity levels of those insufficiently active people.

My Department is also aware of the valuable role that sport can have in promoting positive mental health and we have been working with Sport NI and the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure to ensure that sporting bodies and personalities are actively involved in promoting healthier lifestyles and, in particular, suicide prevention. The Public Health Agency, in implementing the "Protect Life" suicide prevention strategy, also continues to explore how sports organisations, sporting personalities, and major sporting occasions can contribute to initiatives aimed at promoting positive mental health and addressing the stigma that is still, unfortunately, associated with mental illness.

As I have said on many occasions, any investment into preventative actions which improve the health and wellbeing of the population are an investment for the future. Whilst the savings to the health service due to the reduction of rates for amateur sports clubs may not be entirely quantifiable at this stage, I believe that any initiative that reduces running costs for the clubs, which can then be passed on to their members, is likely to bring benefits by widening access to sport through increasing the level and range of more affordable activities for local communities. This will clearly impact positively on health and wellbeing levels for the participants

I am of course very mindful of the challenging financial circumstances that the Executive faces.

To further inform discussion of this topic I have provided additional information (at Tab A) on Physical Activity, Obesity, and Mental Health which you may find interesting and helpful.



Edwin Poots MLA
Minister for Health Social Services and Public Safety

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND OBESITY

Obesity Prevalence

1. Health Survey Northern Ireland 2012-13 (HSNI) – 25% of children aged 2-10 years old were classified as either overweight or obese. A fifth (19%) was classified as overweight and 6% as obese. There was no significant difference between boys and girls.
2. HSNI 2012-13 – 62% of adults were classified as either overweight or obese. A quarter of adults (25%) were obese with a further two-fifths (37%) classified as overweight. Males (69%) were more likely than females (57%) to be overweight or obese.

What are the related health conditions related to obesity?

3. Being obese can reduce life expectancy by up to 9 years, and can affect emotional or psychological wellbeing and self-esteem. Epidemiological research has indicated that being obese can increase the risk of a range of health conditions including:
 - heart disease and stroke;
 - type II diabetes;
 - some cancers, including post menopausal breast cancer;
 - mental health issues such as depression; and
 - complications in pregnancy.

Cost of Obesity

4. In November 2012 a Safefood report regarding the direct and indirect cost of overweight and obesity noted that in 2009 in Northern Ireland the estimated cost was £369,799,820 (2009 exchange rate). In NI 25% of the costs were direct healthcare costs and 75% were indirect.
5. DHSSPS has committed to investing £7.2 million into the Obesity Prevention Framework over the term of the Programme for Government.

A Fitter Future for All

6. The DHSSPS-led cross-Departmental Obesity Prevention Framework: A Fitter Future for All 2012-2022, was launched in March 2012.

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/framework-preventing-addressing-overweight-obesity-ni-2012-2022.pdf>

7. The Framework acknowledges the impact of the obesogenic environment and the importance of providing people with adequate opportunities for participation in physical activity. Some of the physical activity related outcomes within the framework include:
 - children and young people can access opportunities and facilities for physical activity and play within their local community;
 - those in University and FE Colleges supported to be more physically active, to eat healthily and develop practical food skills;
 - reviews of planning policies take account of the impact of planning on health and opportunities for sustainable physical activity; and
 - Sport Matters Strategy implemented.

Physical Activity

8. Physical Activity, combined with a healthy and nutritious diet, is an important element to help keep both the body, and the mind, fit and healthy. Research shows that participation in regular physical activity may have significant benefits for health including: boosting the immune system, and helping to prevent heart disease, cardiovascular disease, and Type 2 diabetes, all of which are health risks linked to overweight and obesity.
9. Physical Activity is not only an important element in contributing to maintaining a healthy weight, it has many benefits for improving mental health, helping prevent depression, and promoting or maintaining positive self-esteem.

Start Active, Stay Active: CMOs' Recommendations for Physical Activity

10. The Chief Medical Officers' Recommendations for Physical activity Report: *Start Active, Stay Active* 2011, acknowledges the potential consequences of inactivity for health and health services particularly considering the potential benefits physical activity has as part of the treatment for heart attacks, strokes, weight management/interventions and obesity prevention. The full guidelines can be accessed through the DHSSPS internet site: <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/obesity-prevention>
11. It is recommended that adults should be aiming for 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days (at least five days) each week. For health benefits activities should last 10 minutes or more. Children should have at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity each day. Any physical activity however is better than none.
12. HSNi 2012-13 – Just over half of respondents (53%) met the new recommendations of 150 or more minutes of exercise per week, while 28% did less than 30 minutes exercise per week. Males (59%) were more likely than females (49%) to meet the recommended level of exercise.
13. Start Active, Stay Active also reports that 'While increasing the activity levels of all adults who are not meeting the recommendations is important, targeting those adults who are significantly inactive (i.e. engaging in less than 30 minutes of activity per week) will produce the greatest reduction in chronic diseases'.

Sedentary behaviour

14. HSNi 2012-13 – Over two-fifths of respondents aged 19 and over (45%) reported having over four hours of sedentary time per day on weekdays, while 17% were sedentary for between three and four hours.

Cost of Physical Inactivity to health

15. The World Health Organisation (2010) *Global Recommendations for Physical Activity for Health* reported that:
 - Physical inactivity is now identified as the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality; and
 - Physical Activity levels are rising in many countries with major implications for the prevalence of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and the general health of the population worldwide.

16. *Global health risks: mortality and burden of disease attributable to selected major risks.*

Geneva, World Health Organization, 2009 reported that:

- Physical inactivity has been identified as the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality (6% of deaths globally). This follows high blood pressure (13%), tobacco use (9%) and high blood glucose (6%). Overweight and obesity are responsible for 5% of global mortality.
- Physical inactivity is estimated as being the principal cause for approximately 21–25% of breast and colon cancer burden, 27% of diabetes and approximately 30% of ischaemic heart disease burden.
- It has been shown that participation in regular physical activity reduces the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke, diabetes, hypertension, colon cancer, breast cancer and depression.
- Additionally, physical activity is a key determinant of energy expenditure, and thus is fundamental to energy balance and weight control

The Public Health Agency

17. The Public Health Agency promotes physical activity as a key area in improving health and well-being. The Agency supports a range of interventions which can be used by primary care practitioners to promote physical activity for disease prevention and management; these include self –directed, unsupervised activities, facilities or services such as: swimming, gardening, cycling, walking, and activities of daily living.

18. The Public Health Agency (PHA) promotes the uptake of cycling for example, through a range of initiatives. Many of these initiatives are taken forward by local health improvement teams in conjunction with partners across a range of sectors, including local government, health, education, community and voluntary sectors.

19. PHA initiatives include:

- **'Active Travel Initiatives** - The Belfast Health and Social Wellbeing Improvement Team provides support to Active Travel as part of the Active Belfast programme, through the Active Belfast grant scheme.
- **Physical Activity Co-ordinators** - The PHA funds Physical Activity Co-ordinators
- **Physical activity referral programmes** – Physical activity referral programmes have been established across Northern Ireland involving partnerships between primary care and leisure services, are coordinated by the local physical activity

coordinators and leisure services within local councils, and are currently being standardised across Northern Ireland.

Physical Activity and Mental Health

20. Mental health and wellbeing is an issue for every person, family, and community in Northern Ireland. Positive mental health and wellbeing is linked to good physical health and is fundamental to achieving improved educational attainment, increased employment opportunities, reduced criminality and social exclusion, and reduced health inequalities. The Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health has estimated that the annual cost of mental illness to the economy is £3.8b.
21. Physical health and mental health are inseparable. Positive steps for mental health include linking healthy lifestyle messages such as diet, exercise, creative leisure, sensible drinking, to the promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing. Evidence for this is cited in the Government Office of Science "Foresight Report " which promotes a "five-a-day" programme of social and personal activities, that includes a category on being active through sports, hobbies, and daily light exercise.
22. The Department of Health has been working with sporting bodies, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Public Health Agency (PHA) to raise awareness of suicide within the sporting community and to promote positive mental health through sport. This joint working was initiated through the Ministerial Co-ordination Group on Suicide Prevention.
23. The Irish Football Association (IFA) has made extensive efforts over the past 18 months to raise awareness of mental health and healthy lifestyle issues through local football coaching programmes and schools visits. The Association has worked closely with PHA and DCAL in developing its health promoting programmes.
24. The IFA have developed a programme called *Health Carousels* targeting twenty secondary schools in socially deprived areas in greater Belfast. The initiative is part of a health programme, developed by the IFA, which targets clubs (managers, coaches and players), and schools throughout Northern Ireland, to promote healthy eating, sports nutrition and mental health awareness. The pilot programme is funded by DCAL.

25. The Health Carousel workshops address mental health awareness - using sport as the vehicle to provide students with a better understanding of stress, depression, suicide and the mental health challenges presented by alcohol and drugs. They also cover nutrition and diet (eating for a healthy lifestyle), and the benefits of being physically active.
26. Future plans include: the development of a health and wellbeing charter for IFA member organisations; training for IFA staff and associated partners on mental health and healthy lifestyle promotion; and the development of marketing material (leaflets, web site etc) which will promote key mental and healthy lifestyle themes in a football context.
27. In 2013, DCAL and Sport NI delivered a Mental Health and Well Being through Sport pilot programme to support PHA in raising awareness of mental health. The pilot engaged with 5 Governing Bodies of Sport (GBs) – IFA, GAA, IRFU, PGA and the IABA (boxing). Each nominated 5 clubs giving 25 in total who committed to raising awareness of mental health. SNI enlisted support from elite athletes and from BBC Sport to edit and produce a video.
28. The 25 clubs have members totalling 8000 plus their families, followers and visiting teams/athletes. Over 2000 people viewed the video online which linked to the [mindingyourhead](#) website. PHA investment was secured to enable SportNI to deliver mental health awareness training for the 25 pilot clubs and community groups in their engagement areas which is being delivered by Mindwise and Aware Defeat Depression in early 2014. A second phase with a further 15 clubs is in development.
29. DCAL piloted a Suicide Prevention Awareness Programme to increase awareness of the issue within sports clubs at community level in rural and urban areas. The programme was delivered in conjunction with the rural based Níamh Louise Foundation and one urban based PIPS Charity.
30. In addition, DCAL is providing funding, for the period 2012/13 to 2014/15, through a tackling poverty and social inclusion initiative, to the Irish Football Association for a Health Programme, part of which will address issues around suicide awareness.