Plan to improve
IRELAND’S HEALTH AND REDUCE THE BURDEN OF OBESITY

A NEW policy and action plan aims to reverse obesity trends, prevent health complications and reduce the overall burden for individuals, families, the health system and the wider society and economy.

Minister for Health, Simon Harris, together with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone TD, and Minister of State for Health Promotion, Marcella Corcoran Kennedy TD recently launched A Healthy Weight for Ireland - Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2020 and Healthy Lifestyles - A Consultation with Children and Young People.

In recent years, levels of overweight and obesity have increased dramatically with 60% of adults and one in four children in Ireland either overweight or obese.

It is estimated that the cost to society in Ireland of adult obesity exceeds €1 billion per annum.

Overweight and obesity are significant risk factors for many chronic diseases.

The links between obesity and heart disease, cancers, Type 2 diabetes, mental health issues, respiratory problems and musculoskeletal conditions are well established.

The ministers announced a range of actions which would be undertaken over the coming years to address the growing concerns about overweight and obesity.

These include:
- New national Healthy Eating Guidelines
- Calorie Posting Legislation
- Development of a Nutrition Policy
- A new clinical Lead for Obesity will be appointed in the HSE
- Prioritisation of Obesity services in the HSE service plans for 2017 and subsequent years
- Support for introduction of a Sugar Levy to encourage a reduction in the rates of consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages
- Working with key stakeholders to develop a voluntary Industry Code of Practice for food advertising, promotion and marketing
- ‘Whole of school’ approaches to healthy lifestyles with the Department of Education and Skills
- Development of guidelines in relation to the built environment
- Agreement on food reformulation targets with the food industry and establishment of a forum for engagement with industry on best practice initiatives towards a healthy food environment.

Welcoming the launch, Sarah O’Brien, HSE National Lead, Healthy Eating and Active Living programme said, "The launch of the plan is most welcome and many of the actions will be implemented by the HSE.

"We look forward to co-operating with colleagues in the Department of Health and other partners who are equally concerned about Ireland’s growing weight problem.

"The accompanying report on ‘Healthy Lifestyles with Children and Young People’ gives us insights into the views of children and teenagers and how they think society should tackle healthy lifestyles."

Minister Marcella Corcoran Kennedy; Margaret O’Neill, HSE National Dietetic Advisor; Minister Simon Harris; and Sarah O’Brien, HSE National Lead, Healthy Eating and Active Living Programme pictured at the launch. PHOTO: CONOR MCCABE.