

# Obesity fight focuses on multi-buys

**John Boothman**

MULTI-BUY food and confectionery deals could be outlawed in a public health measure that would echo Scottish government proposals for restrictions on the sale of alcohol.

It is one of the steps campaigners want to see in the SNP administration's diet and obesity strategy which they expect to be announced in the programme for government this week after the party's Holyrood manifesto included a commitment to a new approach. Earlier this year a Scottish parliament briefing described obesity as a "significant and growing burden" on the nation that could be costing the economy more than £4bn annually.

The costs to NHS Scotland alone were estimated at £600m a year. Estimates suggest that if obesity continues to rise at the current rate, 40% of the Scottish population will be obese 15 years from now.

Campaigners hope the new measures will plug the gap in the recently announced UK government's childhood obesity plan. It was heavily criticised by charities and experts as "weak and watered down" and as a "missed opportunity". Campaigners want a mix of regulation, restrictions in promotion and agreements with manufacturers to tackle the problem.

Lorraine Tulloch of Obesity Action Scotland said: "We were disappointed by the lack

of breadth and strength of the UK approach.

"The Scottish government has the chance to plug the gaps by taking firm action and going beyond a voluntary approach to bring greater regulation into the food environment.

"We would like to see the phasing out of multi-buy food promotions, and, where possible, restrictions in advertising of certain foods, drinks and confectionery."

Although there are limits to the Scottish government's scope for action – controls over television advertising, for example, are a reserved matter – there are other measures they can pursue.

Junk food adverts targeting children on social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook could be banned if voluntary agreements with companies cannot be reached. Food Standards Scotland is also understood to be examining a crackdown on fizzy drink and

sugary snack manufacturers on social media and on billboards.

Earlier this year the government-backed agency issued a call for action to manufacturers and retailers giving them 12 months to come up with an alternative acceptable solution to a sugar tax, and to propose action when it comes to re-weighting promotion of foods in favour of healthier options.

The issue of portion control is also high on the agenda of campaigners. Tulloch wants an imaginative approach to bigger portions. She favours public information campaigns to highlight the dangers of large portions and says Food Standards Scotland and manufacturers are looking at ways of introducing calorie caps on confectionery which would reduce the size of chocolate bars and other sweets.

The Scottish Labour MSP Jenny Marra said the Scottish government must listen carefully to the advice of experts who advise greater intervention to control advertising of fatty foods and alcohol. An outright ban in advertising of junk foods in public places is a possibility, she said.

There may also be a commitment in the programme for government to improve services for people with diabetes. The SNP manifesto promised a diabetes improvement plan to better support prevention and early detection of the condition and improve education following diagnosis.



**WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE RESTRICTIONS IN ADVERTISING OF CERTAIN FOODS**