

# A MANIFESTO FOR CHANGE CHILDHOOD OBESITY

This **World Obesity Day**, the European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN) and the European Childhood Obesity Group (ECOG) are calling on policy makers and healthcare providers to help shape understanding, policies and research that reflect the true complexity of childhood obesity and deliver effective prevention strategies, treatments, and care.

## THE IMPACT OF CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Childhood obesity is the most prevalent food-based disorder among children and adolescents worldwide, and the WHO regards it as one of the most serious global health challenges of the 21st century.<sup>1,2</sup>

Previous studies have shown that around 41 million children under the age of 5 years are overweight or obese.<sup>3</sup> By 2050 obesity is predicted to affect 60% of men, 50% of women and 25% of children if present trends continue.<sup>4</sup>

It has been estimated that the cost of obesity (direct and indirect) in Europe is around €81 billion per year, with the continent spending between 1.9% – 4.7% of total annual healthcare costs in treating overweight or obese patients.<sup>2</sup>

Children with obesity are at an increased risk of complications including metabolic and cardiovascular diseases (both in childhood and adulthood).<sup>5,6</sup> Childhood obesity can also result in serious psychological difficulties, which can have a negative impact on education.<sup>7</sup>

41  
MILLION  
CHILDREN

25%  
CHILDREN  
BY 2050

£81  
BILLION  
PER YEAR

## THE COMPLEX CAUSES OF CHILDHOOD OBESITY<sup>8</sup>

Obesity is a complex condition that can be triggered by many interconnected causes and risk factors.

While many people are aware that meal frequency and composition, portion size, sugary drinks and physical activity all play a role, few realise that breastfeeding, parenting style and eating behaviours, such as skipping breakfast and eating in front of the TV, can also significantly impact on childhood obesity risk. Additionally, certain children are at greater risk of obesity because of genetic and hereditary factors, such as the makeup of their gut bacteria (gut microbiota).



## ADDRESSING CHILDHOOD OBESITY EFFECTIVELY: OUR CALLS TO POLICY MAKERS

Given the complexity of childhood obesity, a joined-up, multi-faceted approach is required to improve obesity prevention, treatment and care. ESPGHAN and ECOG present **3 calls to action** for policy makers and healthcare providers to reduce the impact of childhood obesity, ensuring that infants, children and adolescents can live the best possible life:

1

### IMPROVE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING

Leading positive, informative and accurate public awareness campaigns to help improve perceptions of childhood obesity and encourage healthier eating/drinking, allowing for more coordinated interventions and combatting the stigma faced by patients.

2

### IMPROVE POLICIES

Placing multi-disciplinary evidence at the core of policy development will help deliver more comprehensive and better-informed strategies for addressing childhood obesity.

3

### FUND FUTURE RESEARCH

Greater support should be provided for research into whole systems which focus on the holistic and complex causation of obesity. This will facilitate more robust evaluations of policies that are implemented, helping to expand and develop prevention tools and treatments. This should consider factors including, food environments (in school areas), what exercise is best for respective age groups, the role of demographics, the promotion of healthy eating and the use of revenue generation policies, like sugar taxes, as part of obesity prevention initiatives.



World Obesity Day 2021 is being held on Thursday, 4 March. It brings together healthcare, patient and political communities who are keen to raise awareness of obesity and the many other diseases on which it impacts.

### About ESPGHAN

The European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN) is a multi-professional organisation whose aim is to promote the health of children with special attention to the gastrointestinal tract, liver and nutritional status, through knowledge creation, the dissemination of science based information, the promotion of best practice in the delivery of care and the provision of high quality education for paediatric gastroenterology, hepatology and nutrition professionals in Europe and beyond. For more information visit: [www.espghan.org](http://www.espghan.org)

### About ECOG

The European Childhood Obesity Group (ECOG) is a pan-European group of professionals dealing with childhood obesity and overweight. ECOG brings together experts from across the board including paediatricians, psychologists, nutritionists, geneticists, physical activity experts, economists and many more. The group was founded in 1991 and its mission is to help the European community at large to fully understand the health, social, psychological and economic impacts of childhood obesity. The group is a great platform for networking, for supporting research and for spreading education. For more information visit: [www.ecog-obesity.eu](http://www.ecog-obesity.eu)