

Phases 5 and 6 of a whole systems approach to obesity

Background

Lewisham Council's obesity strategy focused on increasing access to healthier food and the use of parks and open spaces.

In phases 5 and 6 of a whole systems approach to obesity, the local authority worked to create a dynamic local system where stakeholders were brought together to critically reflect on undertaking a whole systems approach, while considering opportunities to strengthen the process.

Phase 5 of the 6-phase whole systems approach to obesity entails:

- developing the structure of the system network
- undertaking the first system network meeting
- presenting the finalised shared vision
- agreeing the action plan

Phase 6 entails:

- monitoring and evaluating actions
- maintaining momentum through regular meetings
- reflecting and identifying areas for strengthening
- monitoring progress of the whole systems approach and adapting to reflect how the system changes over time

What was involved

Lewisham Council assembled a range of stakeholders to form the Lewisham Obesity Alliance, which meets on a regular basis to share learning, best practice and identify opportunities to align actions. The Council was able to obtain engagement from some stakeholders because they involved them in all of the earlier phases of their local whole systems approach to obesity.

Primary stakeholders included:

- schools
- the NHS
- food retailers, manufacturers and suppliers
- town planning
- transport, sport and leisure
- faith groups
- community and voluntary sector

Following a series of meetings on the food environment and the use of parks and open spaces, members of the Alliance identified 3 main actions to focus on for each theme, working together to align actions to maximise outcomes.

In terms of increasing access to healthier food, the 3 primary actions were:

1. public and private sector organisations to support a workplace charter that outlines provision of healthy eating guidelines at events
2. up-skill people including schools and youth services
3. support schools, children's centres, early years providers in developing updated food and nutrition policies

For increasing use of parks and open spaces, the 3 primary actions were:

1. give people reasons to go to parks (range of activities, hydration stations or coffee bars)
2. support schools and workplaces to use parks
3. maximise walking and cycling by identifying messages on the benefits of physical activity

Working well

There were several leading elements of work over these 2 phases that enhanced the Council's whole systems approach to obesity work and developed the 'Health in All Policies' approach.

Firstly, the Lewisham Obesity Alliance continues to grow and is now made up of a diverse range of over 100 stakeholders who champion the obesity agenda and whole systems approach. This has helped the Alliance gain support and recognition from elected members and has created partnerships between organisations that would not have formed without a whole systems approach.

Secondly, quarterly meetings were held with a different external speaker or local stakeholder, sharing examples of best practice related to the 6 primary actions the Council was working towards. Sharing learning with additional insight from external speakers helps inspire and motivate Alliance members to reflect on their individual areas of work and also how they can align actions.

Thirdly, partners provided updates on how they were contributing to this agenda in Lewisham Council's quarterly public health obesity alliance e-newsletter. The Council and Alliance were able to use this as a means to evaluate how engaged stakeholders are and the work they are doing.

Next steps

Lewisham Council will continue engaging the wider Lewisham partnership to ensure a more co-ordinated approach around the wider determinants of obesity through the Lewisham Obesity Alliance. They will encourage stakeholders to embed a whole systems approach to obesity into their policies and actions plans.

This is particularly important as maintaining momentum to date has often been down to one individual, meaning it can be lost if that individual were to leave.

The Council is also planning to set up a website so that information including stakeholders' progress, presentations made at quarterly meetings and e-newsletters can all be available in 1 location to support the overall action plan.

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