

News story: £5 million investment for new obesity policy research unit

The Department of Health has announced £5 million of funding for a new obesity policy research unit at University College London.

One year on from the launch of the childhood obesity plan, the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Obesity Policy Research Unit has been set up to provide resource for long term research into childhood obesity.

It will give independent advice to policy makers and analysts, and develop understanding on the causes of childhood obesity, looking at social inequalities, the early years of childhood, and marketing to children and families.

It will also help to evaluate action that has been taken so far, to make sure the plan works for those who need it most.

In addition, the government tasked Public Health England (PHE) to look at why children are eating too many calories.

Philip Dunne, Minister of State for Health, said:

Too many of our children are growing up obese, which can lead to serious health complications. We all have a responsibility to help people live healthier lives, but with a third of children leaving primary school obese we must take a comprehensive approach and now focus on excess calories.

This can only be done through strong guidance, grounded in evidence. That's why we have funded a new £5 million dedicated obesity policy research unit to understand the deeper causes of obesity.

Professor Russell Viner, Policy Research Unit Director and Professor of Adolescent Health, at UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, said:

Obesity is one of the greatest health concerns of our time and we welcome this considerable and very timely investment from the government.

We are delighted that the UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health will host the new obesity policy research unit (OPRU). Preventing obesity in early life is key to turning the tide on this modern epidemic.

Obesity levels among children and young people present a significant, long-term challenge for the NHS: reducing calorie consumption is critical to reversing the worrying obesity trend, which shows:

- 1 in 3 children are either overweight or obese by the time they leave primary school
- children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be obese
- more children in the UK than ever before are being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, some as young as 7