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**RESPONSE OF: The Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland**

**RESPONSE TO: A Healthier Future – action and ambitions on diet, activity and healthy weight**

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The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the leading medical authority on mental health in the United Kingdom and is the professional and educational organisation for doctors specialising in psychiatry.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland would like to make the following general points regarding the Scottish Government's consultation on '*A Healthier Future – action and ambitions on diet, activity and healthy weight.*'

The consultation places emphasis largely on physical health and the role of diet and exercise in reducing obesity and diabetes. We feel there should be more recognition of the role which mental health plays in activity and diet, and the health benefits of preventing and treating mental illness. Importantly, an understanding of the relationship between mental wellbeing and healthy behaviour provides possible mechanisms for intervention.

Mental health, diet and activity have a bi-directional relationship. Poor mental health can lead to reduced activity and poor diet, just as poor diet and reduced activity can adversely affect someone's mental health. The physical health of people with severe mental illness (SMI) is significantly worse than the health of the general population. People with SMI have a life expectancy that is shortened by 10-20 years and often have higher rates of physical ill-health than the general population, as well as higher rates of health-risk behaviours.<sup>i</sup> Health-risk behaviours include smoking, alcohol and addictions issues, lack of exercise and obesity.

It is important any new strategy on diet, activity and healthy weight recognise mental wellbeing is a prerequisite for changing the behaviours which can lead to improved physical health. For example, altering diet, reducing alcohol and maintaining activity levels.

This would be in keeping with the Scottish Government's *Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027* whose action points include:

- Action 29 – 'Work with partners who provide smoking cessation programmes to target those programmes towards people with mental health problems;'
- Action 30: 'Ensure equitable provision of screening programmes, so that the uptake of physical health screening amongst people with a mental illness diagnosis is as good as the take up by people without a mental illness diagnosis;'
- Action 31 – 'Support the physical activity programme developed by SAMH.'<sup>ii</sup>

It is important those with mental illness have equal access to physical health programmes and are not prevented from accessing such programmes due to their mental ill health. We would also recommend weight management services are equipped to address psychological and psychiatric obstacles to pursuing healthy lifestyles where appropriate.

We would also wish to promote equal access for people with intellectual disabilities to any programmes or initiatives aimed at weight management and promoting physical health. People with intellectual disabilities experience elevated levels of obesity compared to the general population, with adults aged 16-24 experiencing higher rates of obesity than adults over 50 who do not have intellectual disabilities.<sup>iii</sup> Some adults with intellectual disability will lack the

capacity to make decisions about healthy eating and levels of physical activity. Support providers (both statutory and third sector) have a duty of care towards individuals in receipt of significant levels of support to ensure that physical health and, in particular, weight management is addressed when considering care needs.

We are pleased to see an emphasis on developing healthy behaviours in the maternal and early years. Given an absence of alcohol and a healthy diet are particularly important to women in pregnancy and, of course, to the developing foetus and infant, we would support the Government's strategies in these areas.

However, if parity between mental and physical health is to be achieved, it is important any new strategy recognise the relationships between mental health, diet and activity.

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<sup>i</sup> Academy of Royal Medical Colleges and the Royal Colleges of General Practitioners, Nursing, Pathologists, Psychiatrists, Physicians, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and Public Health England, (2016), [\*Improving the physical health of adults with severe mental illness: essential actions\*](#)

<sup>ii</sup> Scottish Government, [\*Mental Health Strategy: 2017-2027\*](#)

<sup>iii</sup> Scottish Government, [\*The Keys to life: Improving quality of life for people with learning disabilities\*](#)