

19/03 Systems Approaches to Local Influences on Food* Choices and Diet*

Deadline for submission: 30 July 2019, 1pm

Research Question(s)

1. How do food systems (including commercial) influence food consumption and what are their impacts on inequalities in health and diet?
2. How can local authorities influence food systems in their localities?
3. What are the impacts of structural or policy interventions that aim to increase the availability of healthier foods at a local level?
4. What are the impacts of changing the local advertising of foods high in saturated fat, salt and/or free sugars (HFSS) foods, or healthier foods such as fruits and vegetable, at a local level?
5. What are the effective** mechanisms, and impacts, of reducing the availability of foods high in saturated fat, salt and/or free sugars (HFSS) foods at a local level?
6. What are the impacts, including on inequalities in diet and health, of local campaigns encouraging healthy food choices through marketing or other means?

There have been some positive changes in the diet of the UK population over the last ten years, but further improvements are needed to help reduce obesity and associated health risks, such as cardiovascular diseases and cancers. A number of policies have highlighted the need to tackle these issues, including the recent Government's 'Childhood obesity: a plan for action'. There are a range of individual, household, and environmental factors that affect food purchasing and consumption decisions. These include levels of knowledge, automatic or habitual choice processes, availability and preference for convenience.

Local food systems are complex, incorporating elements of local, national and international companies involved in producing and retailing groceries and ready-to-eat foods, as well as public sector and community organisations, such as school food systems and farmers' markets. Local government, retailers, caterers and schools, have an important role to play to encourage and support people to choose healthier options. Local structural or policy interventions and marketing initiatives or informational campaigns can be used to influence food choices across these diverse food systems to better encourage healthier food choices and diets. The Public Health Research Programme wishes to commission research to understand better and inform effective interventions in this area. The following are examples of possible interventions within these complex systems, but researchers are not limited to these:

- Incentives for the provision of healthier, and disincentives for less healthy, meal options
- changing the balance (healthier vs less healthy foods) of promotions to support healthier choices
- retailers, employers and caterers working together towards achieving local awards for healthy food provision
- reducing advertising for unhealthy foods
- encouraging businesses to train their staff in food, health and nutrition
- implementation of local policies on food, nutrition and health
- voucher schemes to encourage healthy food choices
- the removal of HFSS foods from till points, checkout aisles and areas around checkouts
- increasing availability of healthy foods

- knowledge of and access to affordable healthy food, storage and preparation space
- out of home food labelling
- the influence of employers on food the choices made by shift workers

The Programme is particularly interested in interventions focussing on populations attending children's centres, schools, further education (FE) institutions, workplaces and leisure places and living in areas of deprivation. Consideration needs to be given to the food and drink products made available, their cost to the public, where they are sold, what promotions are used and the systems in which these actions are embedded.

Relevant populations or sub-groups may be studied, based on factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or gender or other risk markers. Researchers are to specify and justify the food system(s) of interest, their choice of intervention(s) and the relevance to the population(s) being studied. Researchers should demonstrate the relevance of their proposed research to policy makers and other evidence-users. Researchers are encouraged to consider the wider impacts, including social, economic, and equity impacts across whole systems.

* When mentioning "food" this brief includes drink", and when mentioning "diet" this brief includes drinking.

** 'Effectiveness' in this context relates not only to the size of the effect, but it also takes into account any harmful or negative side effects, including inequitable outcomes.

Studies should generate evidence to inform the implementation of single or multi-component interventions. Studies may include evidence syntheses, studies evaluating interventions, including trials, quasi- and natural experimental evaluations, and feasibility and pilot studies for these. We welcome applications for linked studies (e.g. pilot + main evaluation). Secondary analyses of existing epidemiological data and/or impact modelling studies may also be funded. We encourage the adoption of a systems perspective where appropriate to the study context. In all cases a strong justification for the chosen design and methods must be made.

The primary outcome measure of the research, if not necessarily the intervention itself, must be health-related. The positive or negative impacts of the intervention, including inequitable outcomes should be considered. Researchers are asked to indicate how long-term impacts will be assessed. All applications should identify underlying theory and include a logic model (or equivalent) to help explain underlying context, theory and mechanisms. Proposals should ensure adequate public involvement in the research.

The impacts of public health interventions are often complex and wide-reaching. Studies should acknowledge this by adopting a broad perspective, taking account of costs and benefits to all relevant sectors of society. An appropriate health economic analysis to inform cost effectiveness, affordability or return on investment should be included where appropriate. Sustainability - health, economic and environmental - are also of interest.

For all proposals, applicants should clearly state the public health utility of the outcomes and the mechanisms by which they will inform future public health policy and practice. Details about the potential pathway to impact and scalability of interventions, if shown to have an

effect, should be provided, including an indication of which organisation(s) might fund the relevant intervention(s) if widely implemented.

Remit of Call:

All proposals submitted under this call must fall within the remit of the NIHR Public Health Research (PHR) programme. Please go to <http://www.nihr.ac.uk/phr> for details. For the evaluation of time sensitive, policy driven, interventions applicants may wish to consider the fast-track work stream - <http://www.nihr.ac.uk/phr>

General Notes:

The PHR Programme funds research to generate evidence to inform the delivery of non-NHS interventions intended to improve the health of the public and reduce inequalities in health. Our scope is multi-disciplinary and broad, covering a wide range of interventions that improve public health.

The primary aim of the programme is the evaluation of practical interventions. We will fund both primary research (mainly evaluative, but also some preparatory research) and secondary research (evidence synthesis); precise methods will need to be appropriate to the question being asked and the feasibility of the research.

Our research serves a variety of key stakeholders including: decision-makers in local government; primary care organisations and other local public services; third sector organisations; relevant national agencies (e.g. NICE) concerned with improving public health and reducing health inequalities; researchers; public health practitioners and the public.

Applicants should consider how their findings will impact upon decision making in public health practice, whether results are generalisable to other populations and affordable, setting out a clear pathway to impact. The NIHR PHR programme recognises that there is a need for an evidence base for disinvestment and that the removal of an intervention from a population can be worthy of evaluation.

The affordability of the intervention, and at least an indication of the stakeholder(s) willing to fund the intervention, should be referenced within the stage 1 application. At the stage 2 application point, statements of support confirming stakeholder commitments to funding will be required. Applicants should be aware that the NIHR PHR programme is unable to fund intervention costs.

The NIHR PHR programme is open to the joint funding of research projects with other organisations such as those in the third sector. If you would like to explore the potential for joint funding, please contact us at phr@nihr.ac.uk with details of your proposal and the other funder prior to submission.

All of our funded projects are eligible for publication in the NIHR Journals Library. This open access resource is freely available online, and provides a full and permanent record of NIHR-funded research.

Notes to Applicants

The NIHR PHR programme is funded by the NIHR, with contributions from the CSO in Scotland, NISCHR in Wales, and HSC R&D, Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland. Researchers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are eligible to apply for funding under this programme.

Applicants are recommended to seek advice from suitable methodological support services, at an early stage in the development of their research idea and application. The NIHR [Research Design Service](#) can advise on appropriate NIHR programme choice, and developing and designing high quality research grant applications.

The NIHR [Clinical Research Network](#) (CRN) supports health and social care research taking place in NHS and non-NHS settings. The CRN provides expert advice and support to plan, set up and deliver research efficiently.

Clinical Trials Units are regarded as an important component of many trial applications however, they are not essential for all types of studies to the PHR programme. The CTUs can advise and participate throughout the process from initial idea development through to project delivery and reporting. [NIHR CTU](#) Support Funding provides information on units receiving funding from the NIHR to collaborate on research applications to NIHR programmes and funded projects. In addition, the [UKCRC CTU](#) Network provides a searchable information resource on all registered units in the UK, and lists key interest areas and contact information.

Transparency agenda

In line with the government's transparency agenda, any contract resulting from this tender may be published in its entirety to the general public. Further information on the transparency agenda is at:

<http://transparency.number10.gov.uk/>

http://www.ogc.gov.uk/policy_and_standards_framework_transparency.asp <http://www.contractsfinder.businesslink.gov.uk/>