

# Living Healthier and Longer: The Role of Food



**FACULTY OF  
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## Overview

Food is a significant driver of health and wellbeing and is essential to population health (1). The quality, adequacy and accessibility of healthy food and healthy eating behaviours are critical to individual and community health and wellbeing, and are key factors in addressing health inequities.

Although the diet people consume has an immediate link to health, it's also true that the wider food system in its current form – aspects of food policy, production, provision, and disposal – have a range of negative impacts on the environment and the climate, which in turn create poor health (2). These multiple, interwoven aspects of the wider food system (3) are key factors in influencing health, ill-health, and differences in health across society (4).

## FPH work and policy position

Recent events highlight the urgent need for the UK to deliver robust food system transformation to address the combination of economic and ecosystems stresses, while protecting and improving population health (5). Issues of diet quality at population level, food insecurity, environmental damage, and impact on the climate – all areas where population health and food policy intersect – are core public health areas of practice.

Strategic planning and strategy related to these food issues should be led by a specific public health organisation, focussed on the health and wellbeing of society (6). The goal is to ensure an adequate, sustainable, and nutritious food supply is accessible to individuals across all sections of society (7). Public health is central to this process, and we will continue to clarify and advocate for necessary improvements across all areas of the food system (8).

## Current and proposed policies in the UK

The UK has taken some useful steps to improve people's health, such as through action on sugar consumption and food reformulation, but further action is required. There are continuing concerns about the need to address the targeting of unhealthy foods to children and young people, the environmental sustainability of our food supply, and the accessibility of a healthy diet by all parts of society.

More must be done for the UK to create a food system which is secure and sustainable. The goal must be to meet the health and wellbeing needs of the population, while remaining within the ecological boundaries of the planet in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals – many of which point to the importance of changing the food system (9).

## FPH policy recommendations

1. Action to reduce inequalities of diet and diet-related health and wellbeing, with particular attention to the realities of food insecurity and the needs of at-risk groups, including school-aged children eligible for free school meals.
2. Provision of additional resources and a stronger role for local government in the governance and provision of food at local level in both crisis and 'regular' times.
3. A strategic plan for how to shift our population to a healthier and more sustainable dietary pattern, to include a clear definition of what a healthy, sustainable diet means, and policy drivers across all levels of government to support this shift.

## References

Please visit <https://bit.ly/3BEzTb3> for a complete list of references.