

Nutrition, Diet and Health in a New Labour Government

Prevention, prevention, prevention?

After fourteen years in opposition, the Labour Party's sweep to electoral success on 4 July has given them a strong majority for an ambitious programme of government. After appointing the cabinet, including the new Health (and Care) Secretary, the Prime Minister promised his Government would *"not just govern"*, but also *"change the country and deliver"*. In our September column, BSNA looks at what this may mean for nutrition, diet and health in the years ahead.

The Labour Party manifesto focused on a series of 'missions', with commitments it will pursue early in its administration forming the structure for the range of Bills introduced in the King's Speech. One of the five missions in the manifesto is building an 'NHS fit for the future' – and two health bills were announced – a new Mental Health Bill and a Bill to ban anyone born after 2009 from buying cigarettes and increase regulations on vaping.

The speech also saw a commitment to the ban on junk food advertisements, which does not need primary legislation as it was already enacted by the Conservative Government in 2022. This was delayed until 2025, along with a ban on the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to children, to be introduced in future, and the new Government have committed to implementing the ban.

Aside from legislation, what other nutrition, diet and health related policies might be introduced by the new Government?

In terms of the wider food system, Labour's manifesto stated that it *'recognises that food security is national security'*, with a number of commitments on food, farming and the environment, such as introducing a land-use framework and introducing free breakfast clubs in every primary school. The General Election also meant the long-awaited publication of nutrition guidelines for commercial baby foods was paused, to be considered by the new Minister. However, no commitment has been made in the early days of the new Government that these individual policies will be developed into a comprehensive 'Food Plan' or strategy, to build on Henry Dimbleby's National Food Strategy in 2021.

References: 1. Eila M, Russell CA. (2009). Combating malnutrition: Recommendations for Action. A report from the Advisory Group on Malnutrition, led by BAPEN. Accessed online: www.bapen.org.uk/pdfs/reports/advisory_group_report.pdf (Aug 2024). 2. Stratton RJ, Smith T, Gabe S. (2018). Managing malnutrition to improve lives and save money. BAPEN. Accessed online: www.bapen.org.uk/resources-and-education/publications-and-reports/malnutrition (Aug 2024).

Preventative care is a cornerstone of Labour's wider health strategy, with its stated plans to shift the focus of the NHS from reactive treatment to proactive prevention and early intervention. This will range from introducing public health campaigns, increasing access to screenings and vaccinations and promoting healthy lifestyles.

The Labour manifesto committed to incentivising GPs to see the same patient, so ongoing or complex conditions are dealt with effectively. It also wishes to reduce pressure on GPs by improving access to services and treatment through new routes, empowering a wider range of healthcare professionals to provide more care and support to patients and trialling Neighbourhood Health Centres. This should bring together existing services such as family doctors, district nurses, care workers, physiotherapists, palliative care, and mental health specialists under one roof.

It will be vital to make the case for the central role nutrition and nutritional care can have in supporting patients in the community and at home, as part of this preventative approach. Dietitians will play a key role within the multi-disciplinary teams at these 'Neighbourhood Health Centres'.

With three million people at risk of malnutrition, at a cost of £23.5bn a year to the UK health and care system,^{1,2} prioritising nutritional care can have significant, preventative, benefits for patients and value for money benefits for the health and care system.

Sharing this message with new MPs is also important, given over half of the 2024 intake are new to Parliament and BSNA will work with MPs across all parties to reinforce this message. Our members also look forward to working with the Labour Government to deliver their ambitious plans with nutritional care at the heart of a preventative approach, for a healthier future for all.

About the British Specialist Nutrition Association

BSNA is the trade association representing the manufacturers of products designed to meet the particular nutritional needs of individuals; these include specialist products for infants and young children (including infant formula, follow-on formula, young child formula and complementary weaning foods), medical nutrition products for diseases, disorders and medical conditions, including oral nutritional supplements, enteral tube feeding and parenteral nutrition, as well as companies who aseptically compound chemotherapy, parenteral nutrition and CIVAS.