



OBESITY INSTITUTE

WELCOME

We are delighted to bring you the latest edition of our newsletter, providing you with updates on key developments and activity here at the Obesity Institute.

In the last few months, we have seen some changes to our Obesity Institute Senior Leadership Team. Professor Paul Gately has left Leeds Beckett University and Professor Carlton Cooke will be taking on a new role within the Carnegie School of Sport. Dr Claire Griffiths will now work alongside Professor Louisa Ells

as the Institute Co-Directors. We would like to sincerely thank Paul and Carlton who have been instrumental in the development and success of the Institute, and wish them well in their new roles.

In this newsletter, you will find updates on our projects and activities across the Obesity Institute, meet some of our PhD students, and receive updates on our Obesity Voices Hub.

Best Wishes,
Professor Louisa Ells & Dr Claire Griffiths

SUMMARY OF 2024 ACTIVITIES



270+

Obesity Voices Hub (PPIE) members



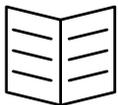
150+

Obesity Voices Hub members have participated in PPIE Opportunities



12

PhD students studying obesity across LBU.



28

Journal papers



4

Internet, magazine, or newspaper publications



10

Conference presentations including keynote and invited talks

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ILLUSTRATING OUR FUTURE

In April 2024, the Obesity Institute hosted a Brainstorming Session to inform our future planning.

Two students from the Leeds School of Arts, at Leeds Beckett University were invited to create live illustrations of our discussions, adding a dynamic visual element. We asked these students to share their reflections on this unique experience, offering a fresh perspective on our collective journey.



Images: Leonie Benn's illustrations

LEONIE BENN'S EXPERIENCE

LinkedIn: [Leonie Benn](#)

When introduced to this opportunity by my tutor, I was unaware of the work surrounding live illustration. I did some research and discovered a vast array of illustrators using drawing to concisely translate corporate language into easy-to-read and informative artwork. This intrigued me and I submitted my first attempt subsequently beginning my interest in how handwritten type can be a useful tool for communication within traditionally non-creative companies.

I spent time working out the best ways to use typography to convey the emotion of a sentence or point in the conversation. I also improved upon my speed whilst drawing. Frantically jotting down a coherent conversation, whilst also

worrying about the aesthetic of the layout is a daunting task that is only improved with practice, and I wanted to be prepared for the real thing.

Illustrating the meeting was a very enjoyable experience and I enjoyed sketching out concepts that I previously would never have thought I'd have to draw and, at the same time, learnt a lot more about what the institute does within Leeds Beckett. The pace of the meeting matched up perfectly with how I'd been practicing, and I loved bringing life to key ideas with brightly coloured pencils and exciting type. I found that

working with pencil and paper, rather than digitally, encouraged me to not be as worried about the preciseness of my drawing, resulting in a way of working that maximised my time and flow of creativity.

I hope my drawing has been useful in communicating the

suggestions discussed and I look forward to continuing to expand my knowledge and skill within live illustration. I have a lot of learning and experience to gain, and this opportunity was invaluable in introducing me to this area of creative work. Thank you!

ELEANOR STEPHENSON'S EXPERIENCE

LinkedIn: [Eleanor Stephenson](#)

Leonie and I were welcomed into a calm and kind environment as soon as we entered the meeting. We were offered refreshments, and the staff ensured us that they were at hand if we needed any help and support throughout the day. We had time to set up our equipment, before being seated among the staff members. We had time to warm up prior to the meeting, so we were ready to go once the presentations commenced.



Images: Eleanor Stephenson's illustrations

I had a satisfactory amount of space, all of my papers and drawing equipment (which included pastels, ink, pencils and pens) were easily accessible. Within my creative practice, I often have entire tables to myself, enabling me to spread out my work and equipment throughout my creative sessions, so I adapted to the change of space during this project.

I found it quite challenging to illustrate a lot of aspects of the meeting, due to the conversations being mainly about plans for the Obesity Institute, rather than particular objects and people, however, I did my best to visualise the subject of each conversation, particularly when morals and values of the company were mentioned. I experimented with using metaphors as a form of visual communication, such as the horse and carriage, and used exact quotations from the speakers to inspire my illustrations and best communicate the topic of conversation in an engaging and comprehensible way.

Leonie and I had both produced several illustrative works successful by the end of the day, and the experience overall was relaxed and straightforward. I would be interested in working with the team again, or any similar experiences. The staff were lovely and supportive, and it was all in all a great first experience illustrating an educational conversation.

OBESITY VOICES HUB: EMPOWERING CHANGE THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Obesity Voices Hub members ensure everything the Obesity Institute does is underpinned by the voice of lived experience, and supports other organisations to do this too.

The Obesity Voices Hub (OVH) is open for anyone for anyone with a lived experience of obesity to join whether you have lived with obesity or have cared for someone living with obesity: no specific skills are required, just a passion for helping improve the lives of people living with or at risk of obesity. Hub members act as Patient and Public Involvement & Engagement (PPIE) participants, collaborating with us and other organisations to ensure our work meets public and patient needs, is inclusive, and fosters the development of compassionate professionals.

"Personally, from taking part in this PPIE activity I felt like the old me that was useful to the world!"

Anonymous PPIE Participant

Benefits of joining include meeting like-minded people, contributing to important work, receiving payment, and getting support and training.

We and our partner organisations promise to treat everyone with respect, provide training, maintain confidentiality, and work with members to improve the lives of those living with or at risk of obesity.

"My advice to anyone thinking of joining is absolutely do it! Working with such warm and passionate people has been a genuine delight, allowing me to explore and overcome personal biases. This experience has been transformative, not just in the research but also in changing me for the better."

Kat Denvir, PPIE Co-Investigator



How does Obesity Voices Hub (OVH) work for members?

1 Become a member of OVH by completing our **Expression of Interest Form.**



2 Select the areas of interest where you would like to support the development of weight management.



3 OVH will notify you via email about PPIE project opportunities that match with your areas of interest as they become available



4 Members should email the project lead to express their interest in the opportunity. *Note: Find these details in the "TO GET INVOLVED" section of the opportunity email.*



5 Following expressions of interest, project leads will contact members to:
a. confirm recruitment and details of the project.
b. let them know they have not been recruited on this occasion.



6 OVH members will collaborate with the project leads and study teams. They will receive payments at the end of all activities unless otherwise agreed.



7 OVH members will be asked to complete a feedback form at the end of the project.



OBESITY VOICES HUB: EMPOWERING CHANGE THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCE

The Obesity Voices Hub team encourages all members to get in touch at any point if they have any problems, concerns, or would like to share ideas or feedback. We are continuously trying to improve the hub and our members views are crucial in helping us to achieve this.

What do the project opportunities include?

We have collated a short list to help illustrate the breath of projects our member get involved with:

- **Discussion or focus group:** These are in-person or online groups that members will attend

and will share their lived experience on a topic or subject matter.

- **Read and feedback on materials/documents:** These are often shared by email for feedback/review on content and language used; project leads will confirm if feedback is to be shared by email or group discussions.
- **Co-create/Co-design:** These can occur at any point in the research process. Members could help develop the study design, materials/surveys, and dissemination outputs, such as papers, reports, films, illustrated summaries.
- **Present as a speaker or panellist:** These can be at conferences, meetings or for student learning, and may include a Q&A section, or members may be invited to present the work you have been involved with or discuss the experiences that have shaped the project presentation.

- **One-to-one discussion:** These take place when researchers would like a more detailed discussion about lived experiences, which might help to develop a research question or scope out a new project idea.
- **Steering group:** Members may be invited to be part of a steering group to help oversee a specific project and ensure the work continues to improve the lives of people living with or at risk of obesity.
- **Workshop:** Focused group activities/discussions aimed at creating ideas and actionable goals.
- **Research grant co-application:** this is when one of our members is agreed to be part of the project team and will have specific activities to undertake throughout the project.

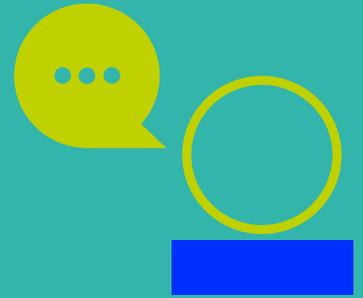
"This was the first time I've helped out and I really enjoyed the experience. The individuals involved were brilliant full of empathy and understanding and just wanted to hear about our experiences."

Anonymous PPIE Participant

If you are or anyone you now may be interested in joining the Obesity Voices Hub, we have an induction and welcome information pack that will provide all the information you'll need, please click here to find out more [Obesity Voices Hub PPIE Guide](#)

OBESITY VOICES HUB: Information for Professionals to use our PPIE Hub

If you are interested in sharing project opportunities for our members to engage with, please explore our "Information for Professionals" section on the webpage leedsbeckett.ac.uk/obesityvoices to discover how you can collaborate and engage with Obesity Voices.



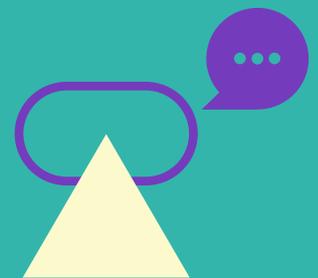
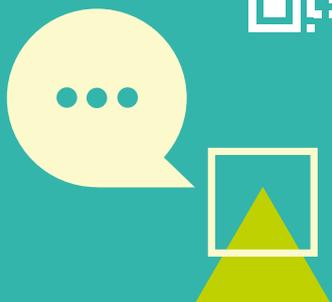
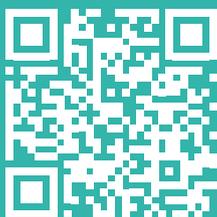
OBESITY VOICES HUB

Obesity Voices is a group of patients and members of the public living with, or at risk of obesity and their families and carers, who work with us and our partners to help improve the lives of people living with or at risk of obesity.

Our members ensure everything the Obesity Institute does is driven by the voice of lived experience and supports other organisations to do this too.

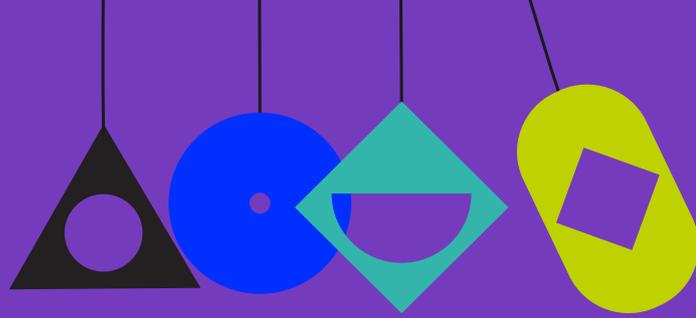
To become a member of Obesity Voices, no experience or skills are required - anyone can join us – all you need is to share our passion to make a positive difference to people living with or at risk of obesity.

YOU CAN FIND OUT MORE & REGISTER AS A MEMBER BY VISITING: **[LEEDSBECKETT.AC.UK/OBESITYVOICES](https://leedsbeckett.ac.uk/obesityvoices)**



MEET DR TAMLA EVANS

POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOW & HEALTH PSYCHOLOGIST



I recently completed my PhD, which evaluated the design and delivery of behavioural support in the NHS England Low-Calorie Diet Pilot Programme.

Working within the Obesity Institute to achieve this work and the other wider objectives of the NIHR funded evaluation was a fantastic experience. The opportunity to contribute to an impactful applied health project whilst collaborating with a fantastic team is one, I will never forget!

Now that I have completed my studies, I have transitioned into a Postdoctoral position within the Institute, where I will continue to contribute (and hopefully lead) other applied health research projects. Presently, our team is working on an NIHR funded evaluation of the NHS England Complications in Excess Weight clinics – a paediatric weight management service. In partnership with Leeds Teaching Hospitals, I am hoping to explore the experiences of disordered eating in young people accessing these services and the experiences of health professionals in assessing and supporting disordered eating.

During the final year of my PhD, I was also fortunate to win the Health Behaviour International Collaborative Award – funded by the International Society of Behavioural Medicine. The award funded an international collaboration with the University of Newcastle, Australia, and mentorship by Professor Tracy Burrows and Laureate Professor Clare Collins – world leaders in nutrition research. This included a 3-week visit to their (very beautiful) campus in Australia, where I was trained in the delivery of TRACE – a remote intervention for addictive eating. The aim of our work together is to co-produce an adapted intervention for implementation in the UK. Over the past 6-months, I have been working with a fantastic group of lived experience participants to culturally tailor the intervention. Our hope is to source larger funding to trial the adapted version of TRACE here in the UK. I was over the moon to receive the HBIC award and the once in a last time opportunity to visit our international colleagues – shout out to



Image: Tamla & Tracy

Tracy and her kids for taking me dolphin watching in the neighbouring Nelson's Bay – a truly unforgettable day! I am very much looking forward to continuing our collaboration in my Postdoctoral role.

Alongside my academic role, I also work as a Practitioner Health Psychologist in the Clinical Health Psychology department at Mid Yorkshire Teaching Hospitals. Our service provides psychological care to patients with a range of



Image: Tamla with Tracy & family at Nelson's Bay

long-term conditions, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, irritable bowel disease, and fibromyalgia. Having trained within the service in 2023, I am excited to contribute further to the department in my qualified role. At present I am working on service development projects to enhance our multi-disciplinary working with medical professionals in the Trust and providing training and consultation on the role of psychology in health. Helping professionals to integrate this into their holistic practice. I am also looking forward to applying my academic skills to a range of research projects and service evaluations in the Trust. As the first Health Psychologist in the department, I am excited to contribute my unique skill set to the Trust and hopefully develop more training routes and jobs for Health Psychologists/Trainees. So far, I am very much enjoying combining practice and academia and the diversity this brings me across my working week. I love being able to draw connections between my research and practice, and the opportunity to apply the evidence base in a real-world context. I am hoping that my work in both settings will foster new collaborations between Leeds Beckett and the NHS Trust as I believe partnership working to be most effective for achieving impact with our research.



Image: Tamla with colleagues

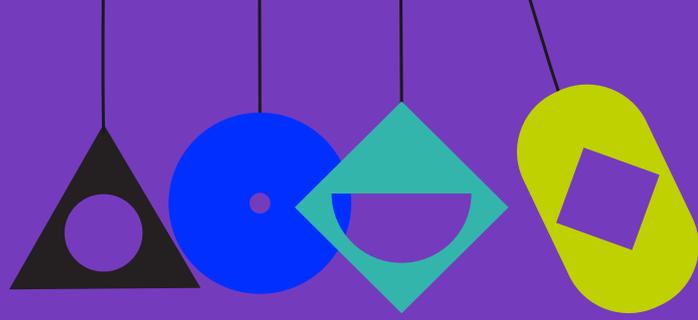
Overall, I am very grateful to all the wonderful people I have met over the past few years who have opened doors for me and supported my development as a scientist-practitioner. I am also grateful to NHS England who invited me to contribute my expertise to the national procurement of the NHS Low-Calorie Diet. In my previous Obesity Institute blog, I talked about the internal battles I had prior to my PhD, when contemplating whether to pursue my passion for Health Psychology. This is unfortunately not a unique challenge due to the competitiveness of the psychology profession. Taking a moment to reflect on this, my journey, and achievement of where I am today is very rewarding and I hope others take that leap towards doing what they love too.

X (Formerly Twitter): [@TamlaHealthPsyc](https://twitter.com/TamlaHealthPsyc)

Research gate: [Tamla-Evans](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tamla-Evans)

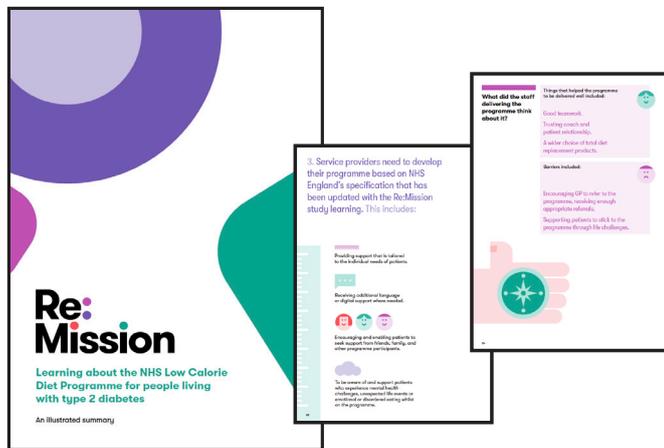
Written by Tamla Evans

THE RE:MISSION STUDY IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT



In November 2020, Professor Louisa Ells, was awarded a £1.5 million NIHR grant to evaluate the NHS Low Calorie Diet pilot, working in collaboration with colleagues from across Sheffield Hallam, Leeds, Lancaster, York and Teesside Universities.

This pilot was based on the DiRECT study which showed that a low calorie diet could help people living with Type 2 Diabetes and excess weight to improve their diabetes control, reduce diabetes-related medication and, in some cases, put their Type 2 Diabetes into remission. Eligible patients were provided with low calorie, nutritionally complete, total diet replacement products, consisting of up to 900 calories per day, for up to 12 weeks. This is accompanied by 12 months of behaviour change support to help patients re-introduce food and maintain their weight loss, provided by group, one-to-one, or via digital support.



Images: Cover & sample pages of the illustrated RE:Mission Summary

The study drew to a close in January 2024, with findings demonstrating that the programme provided value for money and was able to help improve people's diabetes control and weight loss. However, it is not a one-size fits all solution. Older adults, and people from certain ethnic groups were less likely to start the programme – and young adults and, people living with severe obesity, were less likely to complete it.

As a result of the Re:Mission study, a number of changes to the NHS programme were made and has now been rolled out across England. These changes included:

- Making the programme more people focused, — participants can now choose their preferred support method — either digital or one-to-one in-person;
- Improving the focus on using of behaviour change theory and techniques, and ensuring the delivery of the programme is consistent across the country;
- Improving the range and format of the total diet replacement products used in the programme – to improve uptake and reduce inequalities;
- Providing peer support to all service users;
- Reducing health inequalities by highlighting the importance of cultural awareness for staff, and being able to adapt and ensure the programme is inclusive;
- The research informed a name change – from the Low Calorie Diet Programme to the NHS Type 2 Diabetes Path to Remission programme – which helped clarify the purpose of the programme.

The patient experience research from the Re:Mission study was launched at the [Diabetes UK Professional Conference 2024](#) on Wednesday 17 April 2024. This launch included the publication of a series of papers published in a mini edition of British Journal of Diabetes, [a patient experience animated video](#) and an [illustrated summary](#). Professor Ells also presented the findings to the Association of British Clinical Diabetologists at a webinar on the 6th of June 2024.

More information about the project can also be found on the Re:Mission website: www.remission.study.

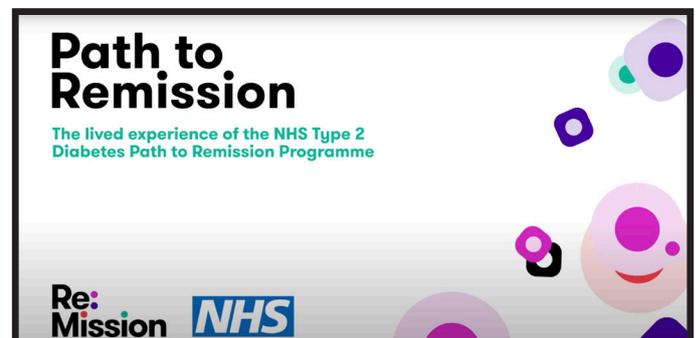


Image: NHS Type 2 Diabetes Path to Remission Programme (YouTube linked video). Learn more about the NHS path to remission programme through the patient experiences captured as part of the Re:Mission study

FROM LAW TO NUTRITION: FINDING FULFILLMENT IN A NEW CAREER PATH

Towards the end of my second year of studying on a Law degree the country was put into a COVID-19 lockdown. As we all spent time stuck at home, I was afforded the luxury of time to think...

I realised that my heart wasn't in a career in law. This was at the point where I was learning about the importance of enjoying your career, feeling fulfilment, and being passionate about what you do, something I couldn't say I felt for law. I had a personal interest in nutrition, not only through my love for cooking, but the multiple health and nutrition related podcasts and books I had enjoyed previously. Whilst enjoying one of these podcasts, I had a lightbulb moment- why not follow my interests and develop a career in an area I love?

I applied for a place on the BSc Nutrition degree at Leeds Beckett where I had had a great experience studying Law, and upon realising that I would need to self-fund my first year of the degree, I postponed study for a year so I could work full-time and save enough money to cover tuition fees. Approaching my first year of the Nutrition degree I felt fiery about study- I knew I was doing the right thing. From here on out, everything seemed to click into place.

Aside from enjoying the taught content on the course, especially with events such as our nutrition awareness raising assessment (pictured), my spare time was filled with many different projects and roles. I volunteered as Activities and Resources Representative for the Student Section of the Nutrition Society, in which I arranged and hosted career



Image: Nutrition awareness raising event

webinars for student society members, developed resources, and helped organise conferences. I volunteered with Bags of Taste, mentoring small groups of participants through their 2-week course aimed at improving their confidence in cooking. This is where I witnessed the barriers people living with food insecurity face to eating a healthier diet, realising that it goes a lot deeper than simply knowing what to eat to be healthy. I spent the summer of my second year conducting a research project with a grant I attained from the Nutrition Society, which confirmed that I thoroughly enjoyed the ups and downs of the research process (as crazy as that may sound). This also gave me the opportunity to present my findings on multiple occasions (one of which is pictured) and I was fortunate enough to be awarded for the project of the year (also pictured).



Image: Presenting at Nutrition Futures 2023

After being introduced to the Foresight obesity map, I discovered the whole host of complexities, mainly out of the control of the individual, which may contribute to excess weight. Such a complex disease requires intricate and personal care, and with the Obesity Institute raising

awareness of person-centred care, I knew I wanted to get involved. I was able to help with two PhD projects by supporting with literature reviews and evaluation forms, both exposing me to the stark number of people living with disordered eating behaviours. My final year dissertation was based on all these interests, looking at weight management support for those living with food insecurity and disordered eating behaviours.

I'm looking forward to starting a PhD within the Obesity Institute in October, which will be shaped around the ENHANCE project. This is such an exciting project for me, as I know I will be able to develop my interests whilst also being able to contribute to such an impactful evaluation. This is whilst being in a collaborative and supportive team of inspiring people who I have been lucky enough to meet already and I look forward to working with in the future!

LinkedIn: [kaydeeshepherd](#)

Written by Kaydee Shepherd



Image: Receiving an award for Summer Studentship Best Research Project 2023



FIO-FOODS PROJECT

The FIO-Food project – Food Insecurity in people living with Obesity – is about improving sustainable and healthier food choices in the retail food environment and is now in its second year.

In January Dr. Claire Griffiths, Professor Mark Gilthorpe, Dr. Hannah Greatwood, Dr Tom Sawczuk and Dr. George Sanders from the Obesity Institute travelled to London to be hosted by Sainsburys (see picture), for the 2-day FIO Food board meeting. Findings were shared from each work package.

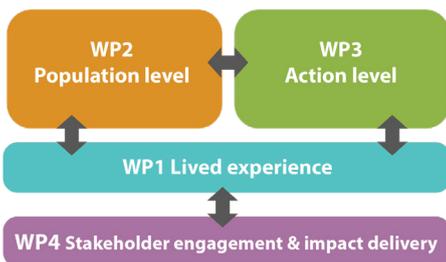


Diagram: FIO Food Work Packages

Findings from Work Package 1 have now been published in the journal *Appetite*, entitled: The impact of the cost of living crisis and food insecurity on food purchasing behaviours and food preparation practices in people living with obesity, Key points discussed highlighting the challenges and potential solutions related to food insecurity during economic crises:

1. **Cost of Living Crisis:** Rising living costs make it harder for low-income people to afford enough food.
2. **Shopping and Cooking:** People in financial difficulty use budgeting and supermarket offers to save money on food, but this doesn't always mean they eat healthier.
3. **Energy-Saving Cooking:** Those facing food insecurity often use energy-

saving appliances and resourceful cooking methods to cut costs.

4. **Meal Planning:** Surprisingly, there's no clear link between food insecurity and planning meals ahead.
5. **Policy Recommendations:** Policies are needed to tackle economic factors causing food insecurity, with a focus on promoting healthier food choices and support programs for low-income families.

Work Package 4 have recently shared their co-produced White Paper with policy and healthcare actions from their stakeholder workshops addressing food insecurity in people living with obesity. The co-developed key points through workshops and stakeholders, including PPIE Advocates from Obesity Voices Hub are:

- **Inclusive Policy Making:** Policymakers should involve all stakeholders, including those affected by obesity and food insecurity, in designing and evaluating policies to meet diverse needs.
- **Understanding Complex Food Systems:** Collaboration among organisations is crucial to address the complex challenges of food systems affected by local, national, and global factors.
- **Evidence-Based Policies:** Long-term funding for research is essential to support evidence-based policies that are effective and accountable, with regular evaluation to avoid unintended consequences.
- **Healthcare Training:** Healthcare professionals need training on nutrition and sensitivity towards issues like obesity and food insecurity to communicate effectively with patients.
- **Promoting Well-being:** Food policies should prioritise health and well-being, focusing on positive outcomes rather than just managing illness or body weight.
- **Sharing Success:** Identifying and sharing effective practices across sectors can accelerate improvements in the food system.



Image: FIO Food team at their board meeting, hosted by Sainsburys

Leeds Beckett University lead Work Package 3 and we continue to make excellent progress. Dr Hannah Greatwood has led four focus groups with individuals with a lived experience of both, food insecurity and obesity. The focus of this work was to understand perspectives in relation promotional communications targeted at increasing food prices and the need for more sustainable purchasing.

Dr Tom Sawczuk, is currently working with the wider FIO-FOOD team to analyse real world supermarket transaction data to compare the purchasing behaviours, of individuals living with obesity and not from a healthy eating and sustainable perspective. This is a novel workstream that ambition to produce actionable evidence within a real-world setting.

We look forward to sharing these actions and other findings with you in the next newsletter. As we continue our vision to work collaboratively, crossing boundaries and breaking discipline silos.

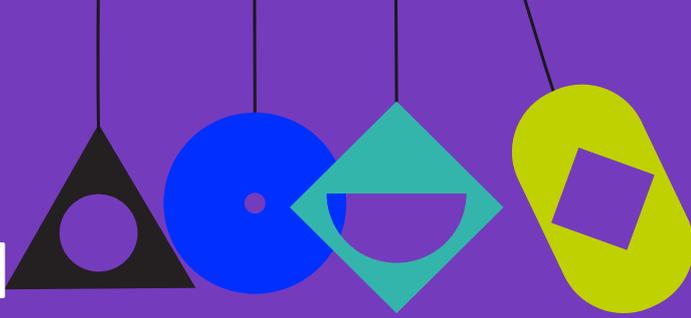
Further information about FIO-Food is available at <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/rowett/research/fio-food/>

X [@FIOFood](https://twitter.com/FIOFood)



Image: Dr Hannah Greatwood at Eastwood Community School

EMPOWERING CHANGE IN OBESITY THROUGH EDUCATION



The Obesity Institute is committed to enhancing obesity care through innovative education and training. Our leads share their vision to transform our approach to education and training.

The Obesity Institute aims to improve the lives of people living with, or at risk of, obesity. As chairs of the Education and Training working group, we understand it is imperative that education opportunities, including Continued Professional Development (CPD) training activities, proactively addresses emerging issues and priorities. We are eager to develop a close relationship with Institute members, including Obesity Voices members to support university wide electives and training opportunities at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. We aim to bring

students together from different schools and disciplines to work jointly on relevant projects that align with the vision of the Obesity Institute and create a legacy of knowledge exchange.

Meet our Education and Training Group leads

Dr Hannah Greatwood has been involved with the delivery of both undergraduate and postgraduate delivery at Leeds Beckett University for over 20 years. Her background as a registered Dietitian and

teaching experience within the School of Sport, facilitates her current interests in supporting knowledge development and exchange opportunities.

Dr Beverley O'Hara has a PhD in Nutrition Epidemiology from the University of Leeds and is currently a lecturer in Nutrition, based at the School of Health. She has worked in the areas of obesity and eating behaviour, and has a passion for Public Health Nutrition. She is a committee member for the Yorkshire branch of the Association for the Study of Obesity.



Image: Dr Hannah Greatwood



Image: Dr Beverley O'Hara

ADDRESSING OBESITY IN SAINT HELENA

The small Atlantic Island of Saint Helena is a United Kingdom Overseas Territory (UKOT) with a high prevalence of people living with obesity and its associated health consequences. The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities commissioned LBU to support the Saint Helena Government with setting up and implementing a whole systems approach to address obesity and promote a healthier weight. An accompanying process evaluation sought to explore the early stages of the implementation (based on the [Whole Systems Approach to Obesity](#) guidance developed by LBU) and understand implications for the transferability of the approach to other small island developing states and UKOTs.

The research identified three factors which aided the first phases of implementation: senior leaders support for the

approach; the academic support provided to establish and develop the approach; and effective adaptation of UK Government resources to suit the local context. It also highlighted several key challenges, including: maintaining and broadening stakeholder engagement; limited local workforce capacity and baseline knowledge related to obesity and systems thinking; and limited capacity for support from the UK-based academic team due to contract terms and COVID-19 restrictions. You can read the full details and findings here: [BMC Public Health | Full Text](#).



IMPROVING THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH, OR AT RISK OF OBESITY | [LEEDSBECKETT.AC.UK/OBESITYINSTITUTE](https://leedsbeckett.ac.uk/obesityinstitute)



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Obesity Institute



@ObesityInst



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PEER-LED BESITY SUPPORT GROUPS FOR UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

CASE STUDY: COPRODUCING A PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Obesity UK is a prominent charity focused on supporting people affected by obesity. They organise weekly support groups that provide crucial peer-led support and opportunities to co-develop research on issues important to those living with obesity.

The Leeds Beckett University and Obesity UK LGBTQ+ project was created to address the lack of representation of the LGBTQ+ community in current weight management support systems in the UK. This community has unique needs that can benefit from specialised support.

Obesity UK were successful in obtaining a Programme Development Grant for *“Developing and evaluating innovative tailored peer-led Obesity UK support groups to provide support for, and improve research coproduction with, least heard and underserved communities.”* through National Institute for Health & Care Research, (NIHR205214), April 2023–September 2024.



Image: A group of people posing for a photo

Obesity UK is leading the grant supported by Leeds Beckett University, in collaboration with a co-applicant representing the LGBTQ+ community, as well as partners from Bradford University, the community organisations, and the NHS.

We held Public and Patient Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) workshops with the LGBTQ+ community and non-binary people who are living with or at risk of obesity and living in the UK to understand their specific needs. We followed up with a survey to better understand their peer support needs, experiences and perspectives on living with larger bodies.

The survey identified the following learning:

Importance of participant Goals:

- Achieve body confidence and acceptance
- Foster a positive self-image and overall mental health

Significance of support and community:

- Mutual encouragement and understanding
- Navigating challenges associated with living in larger bodies
- Advocating for systemic change
- Creating an inclusive group and community regardless of their size or identity.

Requirements for inclusivity and empowerment:

- Safe and inclusive space
- Privacy safeguards
- Security against outing individuals
- Clear code of conduct
- Cultural sensitivity
- Promotion of diversity
- Clear rules of engagement

Language preferences:

- Preferred for positive and affirming terminology: ‘fat’, ‘plus-sized’, or ‘larger body’

- Objections to terms: ‘obesity’ or ‘at risk of living in a larger body’ (over a quarter of respondents)

Preferred format for peer support sessions:

- Hybrid format (online and in-person)
- Open to anyone in the LGBTQ+ community identifying as living in a larger body
- Monthly sessions held in the evenings
- Online sessions to include chat and transcription functions
- Topic-driven discussions focusing on various aspects of living in a larger body

Desired/ proposed session structure:

- Balance between structure and content
- Sessions not focused solely on weight
- Introduction and review of the code of conduct
- Discussions on daily challenges and practical solutions related to living in a larger body.
- Coping strategies for mental health
- Addressing weight stigma and societal/ healthcare barriers
- Exploring gender identity and body image
- Discussions on ‘fat’ liberation and body positivity.

The aims of the workshops and survey activities were to develop suitable support models, the findings have guided the creation of a peer-led group within this community to offer continuous support. The important learning from this case study contributes to a co-developed blueprint providing guidance for effectively facilitating and managing peer support groups organised by Obesity UK nationally. The blueprint serves as a comprehensive guide for peer-to-peer support, offering principles for good facilitation and management practices within these groups.

Written by Karina Kinsella, Research Officer, Project manager.

PEER-LED BESITY SUPPORT GROUPS FOR UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

CASE STUDY: COPRODUCING A PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIM WOMEN

Obesity UK is the largest UK charity representing the needs of people living with obesity and yet South Asian Muslim women are under-represented in their peer support groups.

This grant enabled us to recruit and engage with women from this community, working with our community co-investigator, to co-produce and pilot peer support for South Asian Muslim women living with obesity.

The pilot peer support sessions were attended from November 2023 to January 2024 and were facilitated by two South Asian Muslim women recruited by Obesity UK. An independent academic who is a dietitian and specialises in working with the South Asian community, evaluated the peer support sessions.

Key themes produced through the data shaped our learning:

Suitability of the venue - It is important to balance the need for a familiar community place to run the session alongside the importance of creating an inviting environment – areas for improvement suggested by the facilitators included open spaces, pot plants for added oxygen, and natural light. The coffee morning, which ran concurrently, seemed to overshadow the peer support group which necessitated clarification that the coffee morning remained a separate space. The benefits of being attached to a structured pre-existing group, include convenience and ease of attendance, and reduced travel time. Participants find it easier to attend consecutive sessions when they are already familiar with the group structure and have established a routine of regular attendance.

Mismatch of expectations - Initially, women anticipated facilitators guiding discussions with weekly topic guides. Women were expecting health advice and felt the group topics were repetitive. There was feedback suggesting a desire for more structured content, including activities like chair exercises and more guest speakers.

Personal benefits - Participants valued being given the opportunity to be listened to. They enjoyed learning about foods, they liked peer support elements, learning what other people eat, listening to each other, helping each other.

Importance of shared ethnicity/ religion - A strong theme to emerge was the importance of facilitators and guest speakers from the same ethnic background to share cultural experiences and understanding.

Need for facilitator training and mentoring - Facilitators recognised that the needs and preferences of their group were specific to their community. Facilitators require mentoring, safeguarding knowledge, and training to effectively navigate the peer support sessions, including being able to manage sensitive conversations.

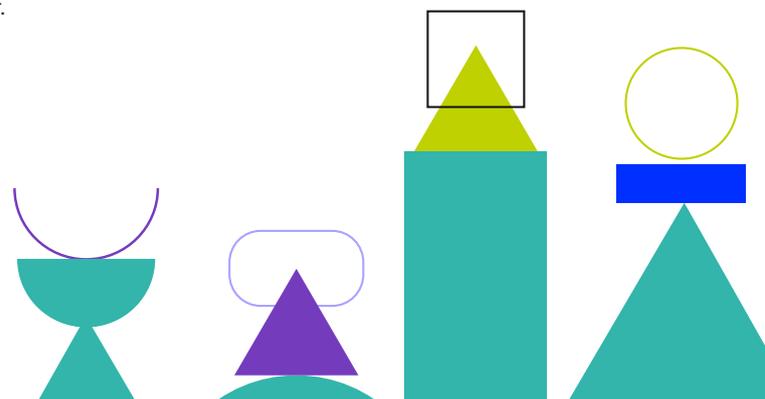
Group name 'Obesity UK' - Participants felt that the term "obesity" carries negative connotations and is too medicalised. There were suggestions to call it a wellness group, as 'health and wellbeing' encompasses a broader range of issues, including mental health issues, exercise, and diet.

In summary, we gained key learning around engaging with South Asian communities in Yorkshire, challenges to recruitment and sustainability, and facilitator training needs. This case study feeds into the blueprint for effective facilitation and practice for peer support groups run nationally by Obesity UK as well as key learning in how best to tailor support for South Asian Muslim women.

Written by Tamara Brown, Reader, Obesity Institute and Co-Investigator.



Image: Sisters Coffee Morning peer-to-peer support group for obesity invite.



EDITOR FOR PERSPECTIVES IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Dr Duncan Radley appointed Deputy Editor for Perspectives in Public Health

[Perspectives in Public Health](#) is an indexed bi-monthly peer-reviewed journal published by the Royal Society for Public Health, with a 6.3 5-year Impact Factor, ranking it 20 out of 180 in Public, Environmental & Occupational Health. The journal aims to publish quality articles that identify and address local, national and global inequalities and inequities. It is practice orientated and features original research papers, literature reviews, current topics and opinions, news and views on current health issues, case studies, letters to the Editor, as well as updates on the Society's work.

Further, the journal frequently commissions articles for special themed issues such the recent special issues on '[Systems Approaches to Obesity](#)' and '[Health Inequalities](#)'. The first of these brings together papers highlighting how policy interfaces with systems thinking, with some ideas and suggestions of what does and could influence collective action to reduce levels of obesity.

[Griffiths](#) and colleagues propose a framework to bring together academic, policy, practice, and community representatives to develop and to integrate action to bring about sustainable, long-term systems change. An article by [Taheem](#) and colleagues explores if and how systems thinking is reflected in local authority plans to address levels of obesity, finding an overreliance of downstream actions, but some examples of upstream actions with the potential for high impact.

Regulatory methods are one example of systems work that can be championed by local authorities. Examples of this are well presented in papers by [Bernhardt](#) and [O'Malley](#).

Fran Bernhardt and colleagues highlight the potential cost savings of up to £218million to the NHS through targeted work with advertising policies which feature high fat, salt and/or sugar (HFSS) foods and drinks. Whilst O'Malley focuses on the local and national regulatory mechanisms to restrict hot food takeaways. Both papers push for the need to focus on upstream or higher leverage point activity and highlight the value of having a coalition with a shared vision led by willing stakeholders.

Other articles in the collection focus on the challenges of empowering seldom heard communities as key stakeholders within the system ([Nield](#)), the enablers and barriers in the early stages of setting up and implementing a whole systems approach to address diet and healthy weight in two council areas of Scotland ([Breslin et al](#)) and a unique, retrospective analysis of the complexities of evaluating multi-strategy, community-based approaches to obesity prevention on behalf of a public sector commissioner ([Gadsby et al](#)).

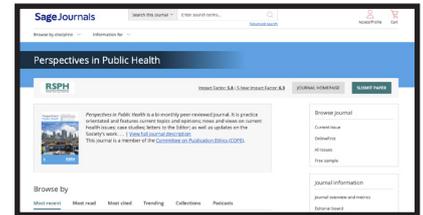


Image: Screen shot of Perspectives in Public Health

NEW SURVEY EXPLORES HOW SYSTEMS APPROACHES ARE HELPING TO PREVENT OBESITY

Approximately half of the local public health teams in the UK are using a systems approach to support their healthy weight agendas. Whilst there has been a rapid uptake of these approaches across the UK, we know very little about their implementation.

Leeds Beckett University, in collaboration with Sheffield Hallam University, have co-produced a simple [survey](#) to understand how widely systems approaches have been adopted at the local level to support the healthy weight agenda, how they have been developed, what they look like, and what the challenges to implementation have been.

We would like to invite you, and your colleagues, to participate in this [survey](#). It will take between 20-40 minutes to complete.

If you are not implementing a systems approach, you can also complete the survey (3 questions, 5 minutes) to help build an accurate picture across the UK.

There are four major benefits to taking part in this survey: 1) the findings will help create tools and training to support local teams in the future, 2) it will provide you, and colleagues, with an opportunity to reflect on progress to date, 3) a community of learning will be established to enable local teams to share the realities of applying a systems approach, and 4) you can help to build up a library of effective actions that local teams are taking as part of their systems approaches.

If you have any questions, please contact the study lead, [Dr James Nobles](#).

IMPROVING THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH, OR AT RISK OF OBESITY | [LEEDSBECKETT.AC.UK/OBESITYINSTITUTE](https://leedsbeckett.ac.uk/obesityinstitute)



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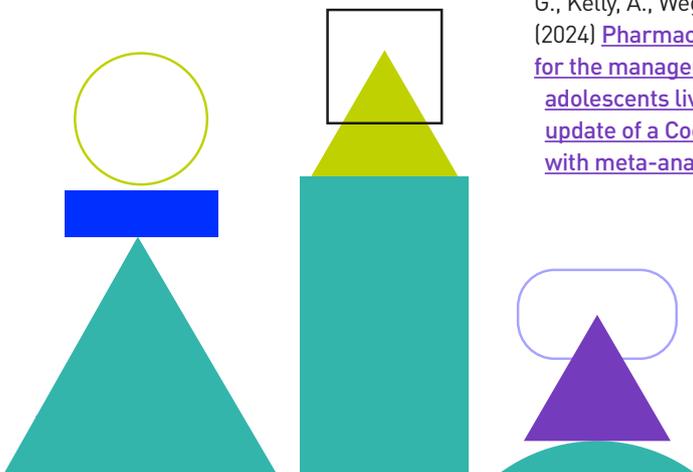
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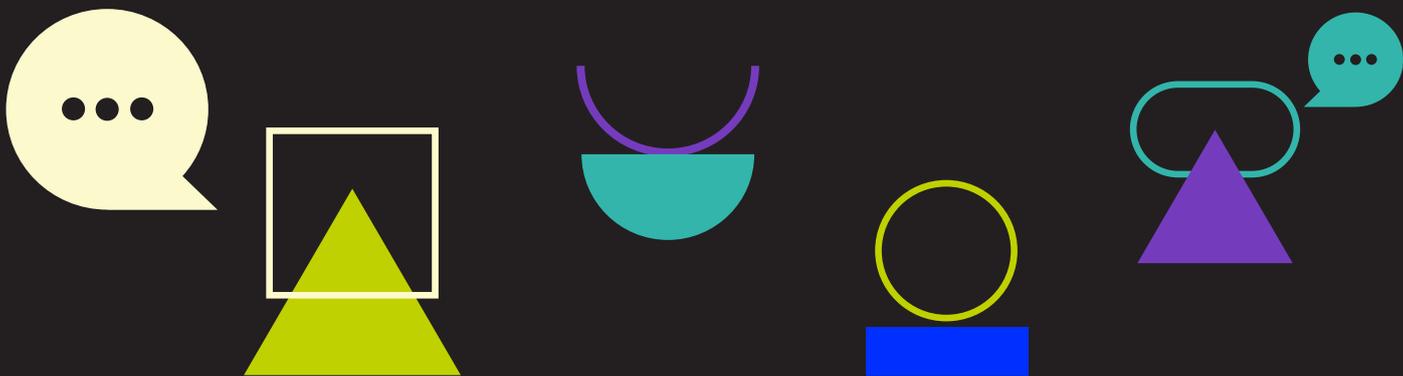
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OBESITY INSTITUTE SEMINAR SERIES

Our seminars provide a platform to discuss best practice, research methods, and the impact of our collective learning, as well as those of our partners. We are proud to include exciting guest lectures and diverse contributions, all underpinned by lived experience.

You can find all the seminars listed below at leedsbeckett.ac.uk/events/obesity-institute-presents. Please use link to register and join us online for free:

Co-creating Family BYC for South Asian & Black Communities: Lessons | By Guest Speakers, Alesh K Jose and Dr Faatihah Niyi-Odumosu

Wednesday 25th September 2024, 13:00-14:00

Learn about co-developing Family BYC, a cricket program for South Asian & Black communities, highlighting inclusivity, unity, and community.

Views, perceptions, and experiences of type 2 diabetes or weight management | By Pooja Dhir, PhD Student

Wednesday 23rd October 2024, 13:00-14:00

Pooja examines type 2 diabetes and weight management in minoritised ethnic communities, offering insights for healthcare policy & research.

Dietary Patterns in UK Consumer Purchase Data | By Guest Speaker, Professor Michelle Morris

Wednesday 27th November 2023, 13:00-14:00

Learn how supermarket sales and loyalty card data unveil dietary patterns, aiding improvement strategies.

Follow us on X (formally Twitter) for updates on our seminars and links to recordings.

If you missed any of our previous seminars or if you're interested in revisiting the insightful discussions, we've got you covered. Each seminar has been conveniently recorded and is now available for viewing on our YouTube channel. Use the links below to catch up on the talks by our speakers to gain valuable insights and knowledge shared.

You can watch all our previous seminars online, using the links below:

[People at the Heart of Obesity Research, by Professor Louisa Ells](#)

[PPI&E and the development of the Obesity Voices Hub, by Ken Claire](#)

[Systems approaches to improving population health, by Dr James Nobles](#)

[Table 2 Fallacy, by Professor Mark S Gilthorpe & Ms Ridda Ali \(PhD Student\)](#)

[Composite Variable Bias, by Professor Mark S Gilthorpe & Ms Ridda Ali \(PhD Student\)](#)

[Food marketing to young people: impact on diet and implications for policymakers, by Professor Emma Boyland](#)

[Personalised care for children living with complications of excess weight, by Dr Caroline Steele](#)

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