

FLOWING FORWARD: TACKLING THE HYDRATION GAP TO HELP TRANSFORM HEALTH OUTCOMES



The case for change

The UK faces a health crisis with the NHS under pressure from waiting lists, funding limits, and staff shortages with obesity alone costing the NHS £11.4 billion annually.¹

The Labour Government aims to alleviate NHS pressure and improve health through preventative care, and DEFRA is currently developing a National Food Strategy focused on food security, health, environment and economy.

It is important that these policies do not overlook the important role that hydration can play in supporting the health of the nation and the Government's efforts to tackle obesity and promote sustainable, healthy lifestyles.

1 Strengthen public health messaging on hydration

- Policymakers should ensure the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS online guidance reflects the vital role of healthy hydration.
- Public health advice must clearly promote water as the optimal, calorie- and sugar-free choice.
- Hydration should feature prominently in the NHS's forthcoming 10-Year Health Plan.
- The National Food Strategy should reflect the importance of healthy hydration making it a national food and drink strategy, recognising water's role in people's health.

2 Introduce positive incentives to encourage healthier drink choices

- Government should collaborate with producers and retailers to actively promote natural source waters as the healthiest drink choice with the lowest environmental impact, shifting the focus from discouraging less healthy consumption to encouraging positive behaviour change.
- Incentivising healthier choices will support prevention goals and promote behavioural change.

3 Champion a nationwide campaign for healthy eating and drinking

- There is a clear opportunity for the Government to lead a major campaign focused on healthier choices across eating and drinking habits, promoting water as the preferred choice of drink.
- By partnering with the public, private and voluntary sectors, this initiative can build on the success of campaigns like Change4Life and Better Health Start for Life.
- A renewed national campaign would demonstrate strong leadership on preventative health and could deliver tangible benefits for the NHS and the wider economy.



¹ UK Government, Obesity Healthcare Goals, March 2025