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International Longevity Centre UK

Latest news

ILC Friday three

- Reasons for optimism - a ban on junk food advertising to children
- The nations' health - looking at the picture today and tommorrow
- Deliberating death - and the value of citizens' assemblies

Reason for optimism - a ban on junk food advertising to children



The Public Health Minister, Andrew Gwynne MP, has confirmed that a 9.00 pm watershed on TV junk food advertising will come into force in October 2025. This will be accompanied by a total ban on paid-for online advertising for junk food, under plans to tackle childhood obesity.

It is about time. The ILC has long advocated for more bans on things that harm us. And in a previous role, the producer of this newsletter worked with Debra Shipley MP, Mary Creagh MP and others on the Children's Food Bill, legislating for better nutritional standards for school meals and measures to restrict the selling of junk food to children. That was twenty years ago.

Unusually, for a Private Members' Bill, it was eventually successful – but only in part. The then Labour Government backed down in the face of lobbying by the powerful food industry, and adverts for foods high in salt, sugar, and fat aimed at children continued to run. In 2021, the Conservative Government promised a ban – but again, these proposals were pushed back.

During the Second Reading debate in 2005, Mary Creagh quoted 2002 figures showing that 30% of children aged between two and 15 were overweight or obese. Twenty years on, the picture is worse. In 2023, one in three children were leaving primary school at age 11 either overweight or living with obesity, and as many as one in five were now classified as obese.

The food industry spends millions on adverts targeted at children. Researchers at Oxford University, in collaboration with Bite Back, found that seven of the ten biggest global food manufacturers made more than two-thirds (68%) of their UK sales from packaged food and drink products high in fat, sugar, or salt. In 2022, £55 million was spent on online ads for junk food aimed at children. And they work. Cancer Research reported that 86% of teenagers said they'd recently – and regularly – been exposed to junk food ads on social media.

Last year, the ILC gave evidence on health and health inequalities to the Times Health Commission. The report, published in February 2024, noted: *"The supermarket shelves are heaving with sugar-laden cereals and highly processed food that is cheaper than fresh fruit and vegetables… There are 20 kinds of KitKat and even a KitKat breakfast cereal, but in some parts of the country, it is almost impossible to buy a carrot."* The report recommended tackling obesity *"by expanding the sugar tax, taxing salt, implementing a pre-watershed ban on junk food advertising, and reducing cartoons on packaging to minimise children's exposure to unhealthy food."*

Bad habits can last a lifetime, and given 76% of men and 71% of women aged 65 to 74 are either overweight or obese, anything that helps prevent unhealthy eating patterns at a young age is positive progress. So, while the Government needs to do more, we believe the introduction of a ban on junk food advertising to children is a good place to start.

Read more on our work on preventing poor health via the button below.

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The nations' health - the picture today and tommorrow



What trends will shape our experience of longer lives in the next 5, 10 or 20 years?

This week saw the publication of a landmark report on the NHS by Lord Darzi. We have not yet had a chance to read the 160-page document but, of course, we welcome the emphasis on spending more of the health budget on prevention and shifting more services from hospitals to primary and community care.

We also produced some reports of our own this week. To coincide with the publication of the Darzi report, Channel 4 News published analysis by ILC's Professor Les Mayhew, which finds that after six decades of continuous improvement, life expectancy in the UK has plateaued. According to the analysis:

- The life expectancy of those aged 50 and above is now 2.3 years lower than previously projected based on long-term trends.
- On average, a one-year reduction in life expectancy corresponds to a 2.5-year decrease in healthy life years. In the least healthy local authorities, the gap between healthy life expectancy and overall life expectancy for men is as wide as 21 years. In the healthiest areas, this gap narrows to just 10 years – highlighting a stark, two-fold difference.
- The UK is one of only four major countries where life expectancy has stalled. In contrast, 11 out of 17 advanced economies saw an increase in life expectancy at age 50 between 2010 and 2020.

We also had two events, in the House of Lords and the City of London, to outline and debate findings from our futures-focused project with Brightwell, who manage the BT pension scheme and will soon be looking after the Miners Pension Scheme. As part of the project, we produced some trends and tips for service providers and have developed a guide for service providers, which provides a sneak preview of the full report due to be published in October.

The picture today might be bleak but looking at longer-term trends we can hopefully more optimistic about our future health. In the meantime, you can find more information about the project here and register for the online launch of the full report from **12.00pm** to **1.15pm** on **Tuesday 22 October** via the button below.

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Deliberating death - and the value of citizens' assemblies

Over the last ten weeks we have worked together on the basis of respect and kindness. We have shared our values, ideas, ideologies that people as individuals have, and we have heard everyone's thoughts and opinions. Merging those together to come to a conclusion has been very special. We have not always agreed on the way forward, but we do all strongly agree on the need have an open conversation across society about assisted dying in the context of a wider discussion about the end of life, helping to remove fear around death. Statement from the first citizens' jury in England on assisted dying, September 2024

Today, the Nuffield Council on Bioethics reported that a small but nationally representative citizens' jury on assisted dying in England had backed a change in the law to allow people who are terminally ill to end their life. Of the 28 who voted, 20 ended up backing assisted dying, with seven against. One person remained undecided. Over the course of the eight-week process, members of the jury changed their views both ways.

As we've argued previously, we think citizens' juries or assemblies are a great idea. In our report, One Hundred Not Out: a route map for long lives, we advocate for citizens' panels with the power to make proposals directly to Parliament on the realities of an ageing society, with an explicit remit to review long-term trends and ensure policy is fit for the long term. And in this case, with Sir Keir Starmer's commitment to a free vote on assisted dying *"at some point"* during this Parliament, MPs are likely to reflect often on the well-informed and considered deliberations of this jury.

Whatever your view on assisted dying, we hope that the ensuing debate will mean that more of us will have conversations with our friends and family about what we want towards the end of our lives – and that we will demand more from policymakers and the marketplace around dying.

Our route map for long lives concluded: *"One thing is certain: however well we live, death will eventually come. So, as we call for change to create better, longer lives, we also recognise the need to pay attention to enabling better deaths. At present, too few of us get the ending to life that we hope for, and there is much to be done to change this."* And ending with "*But death isn't another chapter; it's another book. And this one, for now, is long enough.".*

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