

High Level Steering Group 15 May: Item 4.

Using the Behaviour Change Network

Background

The Responsibility Deal (RD) was established with five networks: food, alcohol, physical activity, health at work and behaviour change. The Behaviour Change Network (BCN) is chaired by Paul Lincoln, CE of the National Heart Forum, and was established to provide expertise on behaviour change to the other RD Networks.

The BCN aims to identify promising ideas for trial that would benefit from a better evidence base, before potentially being rolled out more widely. The BCN does not have any funding and it was originally envisaged that it would broker relationships between academics, commercial partners and research funders, with the commercial partners piloting researcher-led projects and where necessary providing the funding through appropriate mechanisms for evaluation of these projects.

Despite initial interest from a number of RD partners, the BCN has not been able to secure specific commitments to experiments. Furthermore, there has been concern that the BCN might be seen by industry partners as either opening up “another front” for pledge development or a way of avoiding potentially more onerous individual pledges.

Proposal

In the light of our experience to date and the views expressed by some network members and the RD chairs, we propose ensuring that each of the four networks has appropriate access to expertise on behaviour change. We believe that this is likely to be a more effective way of working, stimulating innovation and enabling evaluation of innovative ideas around the issues each network is addressing. It should also potentially enable commercial partners and behaviour change experts to develop relationships.

First Steps

As a first step towards closer links between the BCN and FN we propose holding a workshop to develop innovative ideas around the forthcoming Fruit and Vegetables pledge. This workshop would involve industry representatives who are likely to be early signatories as well as experts from the BCN (both academics and those with a marketing background). In due course we may also want to use a similar mechanism to encourage adoption of more behavioural expertise to drive consumer choices towards lower calorie or lower salt options, to complement the work already underway which primarily involves changes in the ‘supply’ side.

We would welcome HLSG members’ views on the above proposals, including any views on which academics to involve in a workshop.