# Tony Blair calls for NHS to widen access to weight-loss injections to half of UK population



Former Prime Minister Tony Blair has advocated for an expanded availability of weight-loss injections, commonly referred to as fat jabs, suggesting that up to half of the UK population should gain access to these medications. This viewpoint stems from a recent report by the Tony Blair Institute, which proposes that lowering eligibility criteria could enable an additional 14.7 million individuals to access weight loss treatments through the NHS.

The think tank's recommendations aim to greatly expand the scope of who qualifies for these drugs, lowering the body mass index (BMI) threshold from obesity classification to overweight status, defined as a BMI of 27. This shift, they argue, not only has the potential to improve individual health outcomes but also to significantly alleviate the strain obesity places on the NHS, the welfare system, and the broader economy. Currently, the NHS is limited to administering these drugs to approximately 50,000 individuals annually, despite an estimated 4 million people with a BMI over 35 being eligible.

With obesity now identified as a critical driver of health complications in the UK, leading to chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease, the need for comprehensive action is urgent. The Tony Blair Institute highlights that the existing rollout of weight-loss medications is slow, particularly disadvantaging those in deprived areas who may lack the resources to seek private treatment, where some 500,000 Britons currently pay around £200 a month for access.

The report underscores that current eligibility constraints perpetuate inequities based on socioeconomic status, essentially relegating access to those who can afford private care. In response, the institute urges a faster and broader approach, including making these treatments available over the counter and accessible via the NHS App. This change would not only simplify the process of obtaining these medications but also encourage people to take proactive steps toward managing their weight.

Evidence supporting the effectiveness of weight-loss drugs such as Ozempic and Wegovy indicates that these medications can lead to substantial health improvements, with users reporting an average weight loss of 20% and consequently a decreased risk of serious health issues. Additionally, economic modelling suggests that reducing the qualifying BMI could bring about long-term cost neutrality for the NHS by 2035, with cumulative economic benefits projected to reach £52 billion by 2050.

Support for these measures is echoed by health officials, including Health Secretary Wes Streeting, who acknowledged the profound negative impact of obesity on health services and the economy. He emphasised a commitment to exploring innovative, technology-driven approaches to expedite access to these treatments. Moreover, the financial implications are significant; studies show that effective weight-loss drugs could enhance productivity by reducing the number of sick days taken, translating into a potential £4.5 billion boost to the UK economy annually if a broader demographic could be treated.

However, as demand for these treatments surges, there are concerns regarding the NHS's capacity to meet this need. Reports indicate that patients are already experiencing lengthy waiting times for appointments. Thus, healthcare professionals are calling for a comprehensive reassessment of obesity services to ensure that access remains equitable and effective.

In conclusion, given the alarming rates of obesity in the UK and its accompanying health risks, the recommendations from the Tony Blair Institute call for immediate action. Not only do these proposals promise to enhance individual health outcomes, but they also hold the potential for significant economic returns, making a compelling case for policy reform that prioritises accessibility and public health.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14729447/Tony-Blair-weight-loss-injections-nhs.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://institute.global/insights/public-services/the-case-for-weight-loss-drugs-unlocking-the-uks-health-and-economic-potential> - The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change published a report advocating for the expanded use of weight-loss drugs in the UK. The report suggests that broadening access to medications like semaglutide and tirzepatide could significantly reduce obesity rates, leading to improved public health and economic benefits. It emphasizes the need for system-wide reforms to integrate these treatments into the NHS, highlighting the potential for a healthier, more productive workforce and substantial fiscal savings.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/10/16/nhs-cannot-keep-up-demand-for-weight-loss-jabs/> - An article from The Telegraph discusses the NHS's struggle to meet the increasing demand for weight-loss injections. Healthcare professionals express concerns over the system's capacity to handle the surge, with reports indicating that some patients face extended waiting times. The piece highlights the need for a comprehensive review of obesity services to ensure equitable access and effective treatment delivery.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/10/03/weight-loss-jabs-mounjaro-nhs-patients/> - This Telegraph article reports on the NHS's plan to introduce weight-loss injections, specifically Mounjaro, to tackle obesity. The phased rollout aims to offer the drug to 1.6 million people over 12 years, prioritizing those with the highest clinical need. The piece details the criteria for eligibility and the expected impact of the treatment on public health.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-drugs-pilot-to-tackle-obesity-and-cut-nhs-waiting-lists> - The UK government announced a £40 million two-year pilot to make the latest weight-loss drugs more accessible to patients outside hospital settings. The initiative aims to reduce pressure on the NHS and waiting lists by offering treatments like semaglutide to individuals living with obesity. The pilot builds on previous government efforts to tackle obesity and its associated health risks.
6. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/health/2023/03/08/nhs-to-offer-game-changer-weight-loss-injections/> - An article from The National discusses the NHS's plan to offer weight-loss injections, described as a 'game-changer' in obesity treatment. The piece highlights the effectiveness of these injections in promoting weight loss and the criteria for NHS eligibility. It also emphasizes the importance of combining medication with lifestyle changes for optimal results.
7. <https://www.medscape.co.uk/viewarticle/trending-weight-loss-jab-be-offered-nhs-2023a10004v9> - Medscape UK reports on the NHS's decision to offer weight-loss injections, focusing on semaglutide. The article details the NICE guidelines for prescribing the medication, including eligibility criteria and treatment duration. It also discusses the potential impact of this decision on the treatment of obesity in the UK.