

ANNUAL REPORT

May 2024 - April 2025

About Us

Action on Salt and Sugar is a registered charity dedicated to reducing dietary salt, sugar and calorie consumption to improve the health of populations in the UK and worldwide.

The charity is successfully working to reach a consensus with the food industry and the government over the harmful effects of a high salt and sugar diet and bring about a reduction in the amount of salt and sugar added to processed foods and drinks as well as salt added to cooking, and the table. We aim to create sustainable policies and systems that enable reduced free sugars and salt intake.

Action on Salt and Sugar provides resources and expert advice to enable the development and implementation of salt, sugar and calorie reduction programmes UK and worldwide.



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Foreword

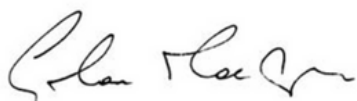
It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 22nd Annual Report from Action on Salt & Sugar.

This past year has reinforced what we've long known: the evidence for transforming our food environment is stronger than ever, yet political action continues to lag behind. In June 2024, the World Health Organization (WHO) Europe's landmark report on the 'Commercial Determinants of Noncommunicable Diseases' laid bare the toll of harmful industries - tobacco, ultra-processed food, fossil fuels, and alcohol - causing 2.7 million deaths annually in Europe alone, equivalent to 34% of all deaths. With the UK ushering in a new Labour government in July 2024, the first in over a decade, this should have ignited the political will needed for the UK's new leadership to drive meaningful change, particularly in areas where the UK once led the world, such as salt reduction.

Over the months that followed, multiple reports echoed the same urgent message. Lord Darzi's independent NHS review called for far greater emphasis on prevention. The House of Lords Food, Diet and Obesity Committee's 'Recipe for Health: A Plan to Fix our Broken Food System' report laid out a clear comprehensive, integrated and long-term strategy to fix our broken food system, placing the food industry at the centre of responsibility, including salt and sugar reformulation taxes and mandatory report for large food businesses on the healthiness of their sales.

It is important to recognise some positive policy developments over the past year, such as the finalisation of restrictions on unhealthy food advertising before 9pm, the uprating of the Soft Drinks Industry Levy, and the launch of consultations to strengthen the levy further. These actions alone however, are not enough. They represent important steps in the right direction, but fall short of delivering the comprehensive, system-wide change needed to create a healthier, more equitable food environment. To meaningfully reduce diet-related ill health, we need a far more ambitious and coordinated approach from government. The 'Nourishing Britain' report identified systemic barriers that still remain unresolved - industry lobbying, departmental fragmentation, and policy inconsistency continue to undermine progress.

As this report reflects, we remain committed to holding government and industry accountable, pushing for stronger, joined-up action to create a healthier, fairer food environment for all. With growing momentum and public support, the time for bold, coordinated policy is now.



Professor Graham MacGregor
Chairman of Action on Salt and Sugar

Monitoring Reformulation

Our mission is to gradually lower UK salt and sugar intake to below the recommended levels with a focus on encouraging the reformulation of processed food and drink products and the products served in the out of home (OOH) sector. Our campaigns put pressure on the food industry so we can create a healthier food environment by shifting the balance; reducing products higher in salt and sugar; and increasing the number of healthier products available.

May 2024 | Salt Awareness Week

Marking our 24th Salt Awareness Week, we shined a much-needed spotlight back on salt.

Regularly eating too much salt can increase our risk of developing high blood pressure, which is a major risk factor for strokes and heart attacks, the two biggest causes of death worldwide. But many people are unaware of the potential risk this is causing to their health, with 5 million people unknowingly living with high blood pressure in the UK.

Reducing salt in our diets is one of the quickest and most effective ways to reduce our blood pressure and improve our health. What we don't often realise is just how much salt we are eating because most of the salt is already in the food we buy.



Over the course of the week, we brought the spotlight back on salt and highlighted how the salt present in everyday foods really add up.



Report: *Are Children's Meals Worth Their Salt?*

How salty we like our food is a learned preference, meaning we can become accustomed to the salty taste of foods being made available to us, but equally, it means we can adjust our taste buds to enjoy a low salt diet. To prevent children from developing a taste for salt in the first place, it is important to reduce the salt content in children's meals.

The nutrition content of children's meals had not been reviewed comprehensively by Action on Salt since 2019. The aim of this report was to assess progress made by the OOH sector in meeting the 2024 salt reduction targets, highlight successful case studies of where salt content had been reduced successfully, and assess the progress made by the OOH sector in children's meals since 2019.

Findings:

Access and Transparency

- Three in four provided transparent nutrition information.
- More than two thirds actively promoted or encouraged fruit and vegetables, either as symbols on menus or inclusion of vegetables in mains and sides.

Nutrition

- Main dishes on average contained 415kcal, 14.8g fat, 4.4g saturated fat and 1.62g salt.
- Nearly one in three main dishes provided more than a third of a child's recommended intake for energy and saturated fat, with 49% providing more than half of a child's maximum daily limit for salt.

Salt Reformulation

- One in three children's meals exceeded maximum salt targets set by government.
- Similar meals had varying levels of salt, depending on the establishment in question. This demonstrated feasibility in producing meals with less salt and should be prioritised in children's meals.
- Efforts to improve the salt content of children's meals in the OOH sector have been made by some businesses, with children's meals on average 12% lower in salt since 2019. This however is inconsistent across the industry, with children's meals from 6 businesses increasing in salt.

Read the full '[Are Children's Meals Worth Their Salt](#)' report.

Industry Comments:

We received 12 industry responses:

ASK Italian – Promised to review the salt levels in their pizzas.

Beefeater – Confirmed they are working through their children's nutrition policy.

KFC – Removed gravy as an optional side, which was the saltiest side available in their kids' meal offering

Las Iguanas – Removed their two higher salt side dishes (Broccoli, which contained 2.2g and baked beans, which contained 0.8g).

Call to Action: Following the report, we called for clearer labelling on children's menus and mandatory salt reduction targets across all food sectors, including OOH.

Webinar: Tackling Childhood Obesity: Shifting Behaviours to Tackle the UK's Public Health Crisis

Our Policy, Public Affairs and International Lead spoke at a Public Policy Exchange event which examined childhood obesity trends in the UK, current policy areas, the role taxation can play in shifting dietary behaviour and more.



August 2024 | Healthiness in the UK Out Of Home Sector

Unlike packaged foods, reporting on health and nutrition in the OOH sector is scarce and inconsistent. Mandatory calorie labelling for large businesses came into force in 2022, but little more nutrition information is usually provided at point of choice. This lack of nutrition information makes it difficult to set standards for product healthiness in the sector and independently monitor any progress made.

Our report, funded by ShareAction and with contributions from Obesity Health Alliance and Bite Back, called for greater transparency in the sector, and recommended a combination of metrics, which looked at both nutrient balance and applied category-specific caps for the amount of calories, salt and sugar contained in a product to assess the healthiness of food and drink brought OOH, in order to account for the excessive portion sizes often provided in this sector.

Using this approach, a sizeable share of the products currently dominating the UK OOH market were found to be less healthy.

As a first step, we recommended the OOH industry to provide sufficient and consistent information about the products they sell, which would bring them in line with the rest of the food sector.

Read the full ['Healthiness in the OOH Sector'](#) report.

November 2024 | Sugar Awareness Week

During Sugar Awareness Week, we focused on the main sources of sugars in children's diets as we continued our call on the food industry to reduce the sugar in their products

It will be no surprise that in the UK, most children are eating too much 'free sugars'; sugars added to food or drinks at home, by chefs or manufacturers, in whatever form; honey, syrups, juices and smoothies.

An overconsumption of 'free sugars' can contribute a significant amount of nutritionally poor calories to a diet, increasing the risk of overweight and obesity, and various related diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes.

Regular consumption of 'free sugars' also increases the risk of developing dental caries, which are entirely preventable, and cause children unnecessary pain and suffering, and impacting their school attendance and performance.



Cakes and buns, biscuits, fruit juices, soft drinks, sweet spreads and preserves, as well as sugar and chocolate confectionery are the main sources of sugar in children's diets. Children and parents are bombarded with sugary snacks wherever they go, often with misleading claims, so it is easy to get used to the sweet taste of food from a young age, influencing future health.

Therefore, for Sugar Awareness Week, we highlighted the importance of reducing free sugars consumption in the UK population.



Report: *Cakes, Chocolate and Biscuits*

Cakes, chocolate confectionery, and biscuits remain major contributors to high sugar intake among children – and with limited success from the government's voluntary Sugar Reduction Programme – Action on Sugar surveyed individually packaged or portioned sweet snacks.

Findings:

- If consumed in the same day, a single cake, chocolate bar and 1-2 biscuits could add up to 1,326kcal and 92.5g of sugar (equivalent to 23 teaspoons).
- Data showed that 61% of cakes, 63% of chocolate confectionery and 44% of biscuits surveyed equalled or exceeded one-third (10g) of the daily sugar limit for children aged 11+ in just one serving.

Call to Action:

- Expand the Soft Drinks Industry Levy to cover foods that are driving excess sugar intake in children, with revenue used to fund initiatives aimed at improving children's health.
- Cakes and biscuits should not be allowed to be sold in schools.
- Provide a healthier local food environment around schools.

Read the full '[Cakes, Chocolate and Biscuits](#)' Sugar Awareness Week report.

March 2025 | Crisps, Nuts and Popcorn: Opportunities for Reformulation

This report analysed over 1,200 crisps, nuts, and popcorn products and revealed how a majority of products are still failing to meet the government's criteria for healthier foods, raising the alarm ahead of the TV and online advertising restrictions.

The wide variation in nutrition content revealed that in many cases such products could be made healthier and much more still needs to be done to level the industry playing field. Findings showed:

- 73% of all snacks included in the report would be classified as high in fat, salt and sugars (HFSS).
- 77% of crisps, 56% nuts and 88% of popcorn would be scored 'less healthy' under the government's guidelines.
- 32% of crisps, 21% of popcorn and 12% nuts were high in salt.
- 44% and 42% of popcorn was also high in saturated fat and total sugars, respectively.
- There is strong compliance with the government's salt and calorie reduction guidelines, suggesting these could go further to incentivise reformulation.

Read the full ['Crisps, Nuts and Popcorn: Opportunities for Reformulation'](#) report.

Collaborations

Throughout the year we have collaborated with several organisations to help deliver outstanding reports on a range of issues. Such collaboration allows us to build and share our strengths whilst working along other colleagues with a diverse range of skills to build on the evidence at hand and create innovative and practical solutions for the government and food industry.

Reports

May 2024 | Bite Back Report: Sweet Deception – Are Food Giants Using Child-Appealing Tactics Responsibly?

Action on Salt and Sugar peer-reviewed the child-appeal and nutrition analysis of Bite Back's [report](#), published in May 2024. The report looked at the front of packaging of foods produced by the 10 leading food and drink businesses, highlighting how many of their products that use child-appealing packaging are unhealthy.

May 2024 – April 2025 | Strengthening Salt Reduction Policy for Malaysia through Maximum Salt Targets

Through our continued collaboration with colleagues at the University Kebangsaan Malaysia, with support from Resolve to Save Lives, we have been working to advance salt reduction efforts through the development of maximum salt targets across 14 key food categories. Using a step-wise, evidence-based approach, the project combines quantitative market surveys and qualitative stakeholder interviews to inform policy design. Our team is providing technical and programme management support, drawing on our global network to support international benchmarking. This project reflects an integrated effort across research, policy and industry engagement to build a healthier food environment in Malaysia.

January 2025 | The Food Foundation Broken Plate Report 2025

The Food Foundation released their [2025 Broken Plate Report](#), including analysis from Action on Salt and Sugar. We looked at the sugar content of breakfast cereals and yogurts marketed to children, and the nutritional claims of baby and toddler snacks. The findings highlight the vast health inequalities across the UK as a result of more expensive, less accessible healthy foods, and is a stark reminder that more must be done to improve diet and health.

January 2025 – September 2025 | Queen Mary Impact Fund

Our team was awarded funding in November 2024 from Queen Mary University of London's Impact Fund for the project "Healthier dining: co-creating innovative solutions for nutrition standards compliance in the UK OOH food and drink sector".

The aim of the project is to produce a tool or service that would encourage OOH businesses to better comply with governmental nutrition standards. As part of the project, the team have interviewed a range of stakeholders from large OOH businesses to better understand their motivation and barriers towards fully complying with nutrition standards such as salt and sugar reduction targets and the Nutrient Profile Model (NPM).

February 2025 | Recipe for Change Report: Incentivising Reformulation

The Recipe for Change coalition, of which Action on Salt and Sugar as a partner, released ['Incentivising Reformulation: The Case for Fiscal Levers to Strengthen the UK's Reformulation Programmes'](#), detailing the significant range of salt and sugar across food categories. Using our research findings, the briefing highlights the potential areas for further reformulation and demonstrates how fiscal levers are fundamental to ensure reformulation happens across the board. It presents the rationale for extending the Soft Drinks Industry Levy to food and supports key policymakers and stakeholders to understand and apply food levies.

March 2025 | Share Action Investor Briefing: Putting Health Back on the Menu

Share Action's [report](#) uses Action on Salt and Sugar research findings to provide clear risk assessment direction to OOH investors. With the OOH sector increasingly shaping UK diets, consumers are exposed to foods high in fat, salt and sugars daily, and as such sustained investor engagement with the food industry is vital to ensure explicit health disclosure and enable healthier food choices.

April 2025 | Food Foundation 'Boosting Early Years Nutrition to Support a Healthy Childhood'

Action on Salt and Sugar analysed the packaging of 113 baby and toddler snack products, covering more than 2,000 individual claims. This research was pre-released ahead of the report in response to the BBC Panorama ['The Truth About Baby Food Pouches'](#).

Our research found there was an average of 20 promotional claims per product, including nutrition, composition and health claims. The product with the highest number of claims per packaging had 43 claims, and the most common claims related to "natural" ingredients and perceived healthfulness. Despite these products declaring a high number of different claims that perceive the products to be healthy, 20% of products contained high levels of sugar, and 50% had medium levels, as defined by government front-of pack labelling guidance.

Read the ['Boosting Early Years Nutrition to Support a Healthy Childhood'](#) report.

Events

Amongst several pieces of data analysis and reports, we have attended a range of events. In October 2024, we attended the re-launch of **Recipe for Change**, a campaign we, alongside 5 other NGOs are collaborating on to advocate for salt and sugar levies on food. We also attended the **Obesity Policy Research Forum** launch and a UPF roundtable with other NGOs hosted by the Soil Association to agree media lines for the Lords Inquiry. We **hosted visitors from the Ministry of Health Malaysia** at Queen Mary University of London to discuss ongoing salt reduction projects.

In November 2024, we contributed to a **Food Matters Live** panel discussion at an industry conference in Ascot. We discussed Healthy Ageing, how reducing salt in products, including use of potassium chloride, can reduce cardiovascular disease, and the challenges of academia-industry engagement. We met the **Dietary Improvement team at the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities** to talk about expected directions of the new government on nutritional guidelines of commercial infant foods, salt and sugar reduction and dietary surveys. We attended several other events in November including **“Ultra-Processed’ Foods: the Scope for Government Action” conference in Imperial**; a Parliamentary event hosted by the **Food and Drink Federation**; the launch of the **House of Lords Food Diet and Obesity Report**; and took part in a panel discussion for Queen Mary University of London **Wolfson Institute of Public Health Research seminar series** on policymakers and their information needs.

Sustain’s Children’s Food Summit took place in February 2025 where we put forward a question about fiscal policies as part of the panel discussion with MPs.

As part of our ongoing engagement with industry and ahead of our forthcoming report on snacks, we held **various meetings and engagement activities** with 11 businesses to apply pressure on the food industry and provide viable solutions for salt reformulation.



We also attended the **Tackling Childhood Obesity: Prevention, Education, and Policy by Public Policy Exchange**; and a stakeholder discussion on the potential of food taxes for improving UK diets. This discussion was organised by three NIHR research projects, FINCH (led by Imperial College Business School), COPPER (led by University of Oxford and University of Exeter) and HealthEI (led by University of Sheffield). Each of the projects are currently exploring different food tax scenarios and the potential to use these as a lever for dietary shifts to improve population and planetary health.

We were also invited to present our research input for a roundtable at the **House of Lords, ‘Aligning Next Steps on HFSS Reformulation Levy’**, joining alongside think tanks such as the Tony Blair Institute and Institute for Public Policy Research. As part of the **Early Year Nutrition and Data Coalition**, we supported and gave input to Bremner & Co and Impact on Urban Health on their consultation response to improving the way Ofsted inspects education relating to improving food and nutrition and health equity.

Our Research

We continue to strengthen the research around salt and sugar reformulation through a variety of outputs, from the reports we launch alongside campaigns, to presenting at events and publishing research papers.

Our research this year included the comparison of the soft drinks industry levy to the sugar reduction programme, presenting key lessons from them both; and we confirmed that by halving salt intake, it can significantly lower the blood pressure of individuals that already have high blood pressure and taking treatment.

Our researchers also concluded that formula-estimated sodium intakes were not recommended to be used in studies associating sodium intake with CVD outcomes to avoid generating misleading evidence. This highlighted the importance of reducing global sodium intake; and evaluated the effectiveness of the mHealth- and School-Based Health Education Program for Salt Reduction (EduSaltS) in China.

October 2024 | WHO Regional Expert Meeting of Nutrition Policies

In October 2024, we presented at the World Health Organization's Regional Expert Meeting of Nutrition Policies in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, Riyadh, and Saudi Arabia.



This meeting explored the role of NGOs in supporting salt and sugar reduction within government policies and emphasised the importance of continued collaboration. Moving forward, this dialogue will help inform our strategies for global obesity prevention and the promotion of healthier diets.

January 2025 | The Nutrition Society 2025 Winter Conference

In January, we presented our study on breakfast cereals with child-appelling packaging, and highlighted the potential improvements and further reformulation that is needed as many popular cereal brands continue to contain excessive sugar and low fibre. The study emphasised the vital policy shift that's required if we are to create a level playing field and improve children's diet and health.



Sugar

March.

Hashem K, Burt H, Brown M, MacGregor G. [Outcomes of sugar reduction policies, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#). Bulletin of the World Health Organization. 2024 Mar 27;102(6):432-439.

Salt

September.

Song J, Chen L, Xiong H, Ma Y, Pombo-Rodrigues S, MacGregor G, He F. [Blood Pressure-Lowering Medications, Sodium Reduction, and Blood Pressure](#). AHA/ASA Journals. Hypertension. 2024 Sept;81:e149-e160.

November.

Tan, M. [Mandatory salt targets: a key policy tool for global salt reduction efforts](#). The Lancet Public Health. 2024 Nov. 9;11, E834-E835.

May.

Wang N, Wang C, Zhang P, Li Y, He FJ, Li L, Li Y, Luo R, Wan D, Xu L, Deng L, Wu L. [Effectiveness of an mHealth and school-based health education programme for salt reduction \(EduSaltS\) in China: cluster randomized controlled trial within scale-up](#). J Med Internet Res. 2025 Feb 27. doi: 10.2196/60092. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 40017342.

March.

Egan B, Lackland D, Sutherland S, Rakotz M, Williams J, Commodore-Mensah Y, Jones D, Kjeldsen S-E, Campbell N, Parati G, He F, MacGregor G, Weber M, Whelton P. [Perspective – The growing global benefits of limiting salt intake: an urgent call from the World Hypertension League for more effective policy and public health initiatives](#). J Hum Hypertens. 2025 March 39, 241-245.

January.

Song J, Wang C, Pombo-Rodrigues S, MacGregor G, Campbell N, He F. [Formulas to estimate dietary sodium intake from spot urine lead to misleading associations with cardiovascular disease risk and mortality](#). J Hypertens. 2025 Apr 1;43(4):681-689.

Policy

We continue to advocate for government action to reduce salt and sugar in processed foods and in the OOH industry – throughout the year we continued to recommend reviews of the current reformulation programmes, mandatory targets and fiscal measures across the industry.

May 2024 | House of Lords Library ‘Eating less sugar: Reformulating food and drink products and government policy’ article

Action on Salt and Sugar’s impact was mentioned in the House of Lord’s [article](#). The article reviewed the issues linked to a high sugar intake, alongside the measures that government have in place to reduce population intake, including the sugar reformulation programme and Soft Drinks Industry Levy. *“Organisations including Action on Sugar are calling for mandatory, rather than a voluntary, programme of sugar reduction”*, referencing our November 2022 ‘The UK’s Sugar Reduction Programme, What is Next?’ [report](#).

July 2024 | Health For All. Consensus Action on Salt, Sugar and Health 2024 Manifesto

With the Labour party coming into government in July 2024, we set out our charity’s priorities in our new manifesto.

The escalating costs to the NHS of diet related disease are unsustainable, but in many cases are entirely preventable. Providing available, accessible and affordable healthy food is essential in preventing premature death and disability and reducing the cost of a poor diet on the NHS.

The new government needs to create history and be the first to prioritise prevention by:

- 1.Improving the nutritional composition of food and drink.**
- 2.Introducing levies to further incentivise change.**
- 3.Creating healthy environments.**

Read our [manifesto](#).



October 2024 | The House of Lord's Recipe for Health: A plan to fix our broken food system report

Action on Salt and Sugar submitted written evidence to the House of Lord's Inquiry, and our work was featured five times throughout their final report. This included our call for an independent regulatory authority, such as the Food Standards Agency (FSA) for nutrition related policies and programmes. It also included our reference to the evidence that mandatory policies are more effective than voluntary programmes in salt and sugar reduction.

Our survey on children's packaging was cited, highlighting the high number of products advertised to children that are unhealthy according to the Nutrient Profiling Model. The report also highlighted our view that whilst the proposed guidelines for the composition of baby and infant food showed some alignment with the gold standard World Health Organization Europe Nutrient and Promotion Profile Model, it did not go far enough.

February 2025 | Parliamentary MP Drop-In Event at Westminster



Action on Salt and Sugar joined other members of the Obesity Health Alliance for a Parliamentary MP drop-in event held at Westminster.

We partnered with Sustain to speak to members of Parliament about the Recipe for Change Campaign and discuss how they can use their position to help influence policy. The event offered a fantastic opportunity to speak in depth about our salt and sugar reduction work and raise awareness of the urgent need for government action.

March 2025 | Sugar impact in the UK. Parliamentary Discussion

We joined the British Dental Association and the Obesity Health Alliance for a parliamentary discussion on the rising rates of tooth decay and childhood obesity accredited largely in part to the high levels of sugar in our everyday food and drink.



Consultation Responses

May 2024.

Action on Salt and Sugar submitted a response to the [House of Lords Food, Diet and Obesity Select Committee's call for evidence](#).

September 2024.

Action on Salt and Sugar responded and supported the [Obesity Health Alliance's submission](#) to the 'National Policy Planning Framework'.

Action on Salt and Sugar submitted a representation for the [Autumn 2024 Budget](#).

October 2024.

Action on Salt and Sugar submitted a response to the open [consultation from the World Health Organization](#) on Nutrition Labelling.

October 2024.

Action on Salt and Sugar submitted a response to the [government consultation](#) 'Introducing further advertising restrictions on TV and online for less healthy food and drink: consultation on internet protocol television (IPTV)'.

February 2025.

Action on Salt and Sugar contributed to the [Cross-Party Parliamentary Group for a Fit and Healthy Childhood's request](#) for their latest members report 'Early Years Nutrition: Setting the Standard for Change'.

March 2025.

Action on Salt and Sugar responded to the [HMT-HMRC Soft Drinks Industry Levy Review](#).

March 2025.

Action on Salt and Sugar responded to the [Advertising Standards Authority consultation](#) on guidance relating to forthcoming advertising restrictions.

Open Letters

Over the last year Action on Salt have helped lead and endorse a number of open letters to the government, amplifying a unified call for stronger, evidence-led policy.



November 2024. Action on Salt and Sugar, along with over 30 other health organisations, signed an open letter coordinated by the Recipe for Change coalition, calling for bolder and more decisive action from the government, to build a healthier food industry.



December 2024. Action on Salt and Sugar co-signed an open letter coordinated by the British Medical Journal to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care calling on the government to better regulate school and nursery spaces and protect children from industry influence.



December 2024. Action on Salt and Sugar co-signed an open letter coordinated by Feedback, calling for urgent government action to reduce the UK's oversupply of sugar and prevent millions in healthcare costs and diseases.



February 2025. Action on Salt and Sugar supported the British Heart Foundations call to the government to commit to a National Cardiovascular Disease plan.

Funding Partners

Thank you to the following funders for their support of our projects this year.



Impact
on **Urban**
Health

