

We know how to help people lose weight, now we'll learn how to help them keep it off

Over €4.9 million has been awarded by the European Commission to a twelve-member consortium, led by the Capital Region of Denmark (Region Hovestaden), to develop and evaluate a toolkit to help people who have lost weight to successfully maintain that weight loss.

Weight loss programmes help people lose weight but they don't help them keep the weight off. The best way to help people maintain their weight loss is to develop programmes based on solid evidence of what works and what doesn't - but we don't know enough yet to do this well. A new European Union (EU)-funded project will bring together leading researchers in behaviour change, technology providers and weight loss maintenance experts from across the continent to develop tools that will help people maintain their weight loss. The project, called 'NoHoW', will gather new evidence about how people change and sustain new behaviours. Using this evidence, NoHoW researchers will build a weight loss maintenance Toolkit that will include mobile apps, web-based tools and inputs from other technologies, such as smart scales and activity trackers that will feed back information to participants based on personalised prediction models of what is most effective for them.

The Toolkit will be a central part of an innovative weight loss maintenance programme, which also includes recent research in behavioural science and motivation, emotion regulation and stress management. This programme will be tested in the real world by participants in Denmark, Portugal and the United Kingdom, to discover what works and what doesn't work, leading to further improvement of the Toolkit and the programme. Throughout the project, the partners involved will work together to develop weight loss maintenance programmes with potential commercial value.

Professor Berit L Heitmann, Coordinator of NoHoW and the Director for the Research Unit for Dietary Studies at the Parker Institute, Copenhagen University Hospital, said: "The challenge today is not to help people lose weight – most people can do that. The challenge is to help people maintain their weight loss over long time. Generally speaking 90-95% of all overweight and obese people have had one or more successful weight loss attempt but only 5-10% have successfully kept the weight off for more than 5 years.

She adds: "Overweight and obesity affect half of the adult population in Europe. A health problem this size requires accessible and scalable solutions, and can only realistically be dealt with with the use of information and communication technology. In NoHoW, we will find out what behavioural components, including stress management and emotion regulation skills, best enable weight loss maintenance."

Professor James Stubbs, Coordinator of the NoHoW intervention study at the University of Derby added: "Online weight loss tools, including mobile phone apps, are now widely available but they are rarely based on clear scientific evidence of what really works. For weight loss measures to work, they must engage and motivate users to lose weight and sustain their weight loss journey, even when the going gets tough and they regain weight. This means developing evidence-based tools to help them cope with stresses, negative emotions and weight relapse that can derail the long-term maintenance of behaviour change.

The success of the NoHow project's bid was due to the European Commission's concern that any research should have a real impact on European obesity. With the current consortium of academic and commercial partners we can directly implement the project results across a wide population, rather than the information getting no further than academic journals. Commercialisation of project results will provide much-needed weight loss maintenance services that promote health education and long-term weight management programmes and give this expertise to the citizen, making them better able to manage their own weight and health"



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Notes to editors:

The full partners in the NoHoW project are Region Hovedstaden, Denmark (Project Co-ordinator); the James Hutton Institute, UK; European Association for the Study of Obesity; Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal; Slimming World; University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK; Teknologian Tutkimuskeskus VTT, Finland; Aarhus University, Denmark; Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal; Axivity Ltd, UK; University of Derby, UK; and Pintail Ltd, Ireland.