



IMPERIAL



Public engagement opportunity for research project looking at reduction of ultra processed food consumption (GOLDFINCH)

About the project

The food we eat has a powerful effect on our health. It can affect our chances of developing obesity or illnesses like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer. Studies show that certain 'ultra-processed' foods (UPFs) can encourage people to eat too much and increase the risk of these diseases. UPFs are industrially produced, often contain chemicals like colours and flavours to make them more appealing, and are heavily marketed by well-known brands. Examples include sweetened breakfast cereals, processed meats and meat substitutes, ready meals, and fizzy drinks. These foods often contain high levels of sugar, salt, and fat. They are often cheaper and more available than less processed foods and are more commonly eaten by people on lower incomes – who already face worse health outcomes.



GOLDFINCH is a study on UPFs that is being led by researchers at Imperial College. The project started in February 2026 and runs until June 2028. This research will explore how changes to food taxes could help people eat fewer ultra-processed foods and more minimally processed foods. For example, if one type of food is taxed more heavily, it may become more expensive. If another type is taxed less, it may become cheaper and encourage people to choose healthier options. We will look at what people are buying and see if tax changes in food prices would lead people to buy fewer ultra-processed foods and choose healthier ones instead. We will estimate what impact eating less ultra-processed food might have on people's health. Our goal is to provide Government with robust evidence to support fair and effective food policies that promote better health for everyone. The GOLDFINCH project is an extension of a previous project run at Imperial called FINCH. This project looked at options for taxing foods high in fat, salt and sugar to see if this reduced purchases of unhealthy foods as well as being acceptable to the public.

About the Public Reference Group (PRG)

Project partner, Health Equalities Group, is currently looking to recruit members of the public to the project's Public Reference Group (PRG). The PRG will help researchers to understand the issues that matter to communities most affected by unhealthy diets. The PRG will also support project activities, including the design and interpretation of analyses, development of questions for focus groups, and to review the findings as they emerge. We will also rely on the PRG for assistance with project communications so that these are clear, relevant, and accessible to members of the public.

The PRG will meet twice a year for two hours at a time. Meetings will primarily be online through MS Teams, but also in person at least once during the project. Two PRG members will sit on the project's wider Steering Committee, so there is a public voice in the governance of the GOLDFINCH project. We will pay you **£27.50 per hour for each meeting you attend**. We will pay £5 per meeting towards your internet costs for online meetings. We will also pay your travel expenses if the PRG meets in person.

Experience needed

We are looking for members of the public over the age of 18 with an interest in healthy eating and/or food environments who understand the difficulties of choosing healthier foods. If you have any previous experience of supporting a research project that would be welcomed, but it is not essential. You do not need to be a tax or public health expert to join the PRG and we will provide tailored training to help you engage with the research team.

What do others say?

Members of the PRG that supported the FINCH project found this a rewarding experience and reflect on this in the quotes below:

"I used to think about the problems of obesity, diabetes, and unhealthy eating as too big and complicated to change. The FINCH project helped me see it as possible using new approaches to taxation and public awareness. The meetings were always very interesting, and I was made to feel welcome and a part of the team. I hope that the work continues with more public representation to contribute ideas and experiences." Vicky – member of the FINCH PRG

"The Finch Public Reference Group gave me a voice in one of the most important public health issues of today. I represented the food needs and challenges that I and others in my community face, hearing other public members comments widened by thinking. I also enjoyed learning from the policy experts." Jane – member of the FINCH PRG

Next steps in registering your interest in becoming a PRG member

If you are interested in becoming a member of the PRG, please contact us using the email below with a brief statement of no more than 400 words on why you would like to join the PRG. We would be happy to have a preliminary chat with you to answer any questions you have about the role ahead of making any commitment to joining the PRG.

Please contact:

Matthew Philpott: matthew.philpott@heg.org.uk

Closing date for applications: Friday 8th May 2026