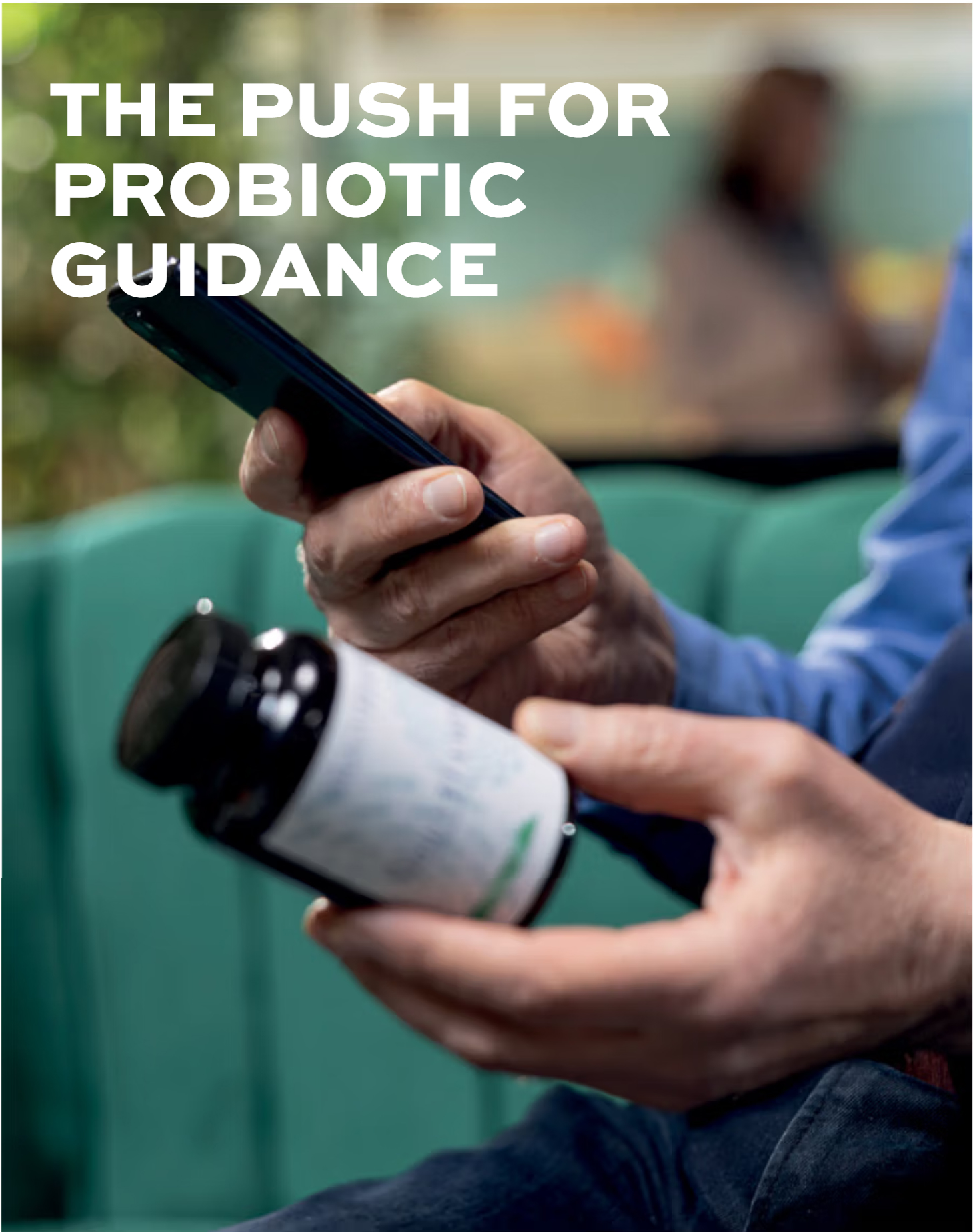


THE PUSH FOR PROBIOTIC GUIDANCE



A lot of the activity at the HFMA is behind the scenes and may take many months before being discussed in the wider industry. This is particularly relevant when it comes to the use of the term ‘probiotic’ and our longstanding discussions with Government.

You will be aware that within the UK, the term ‘probiotic’ is banned as an unauthorised health claim even though 11 EU countries now permit it. This outdated policy blocks the use of a term that is familiar with health professionals and most importantly, the consumer.

The HFMA has argued that the responsible use of the term should be allowed, enabling easy identification, and that by blocking its use a barrier has been created for the individual looking after their own health or following clinical guidance.



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Prevention of illness is a key factor in helping to reduce the burden on the NHS, and a key pillar in the Government’s plan of cost reduction and building a healthy population.

Not allowing the public to easily find supplements that are frequently recommended by health professionals goes against the culture of prevention and maintaining health.

We have long argued that this outdated policy prevents the use of a well-understood term and leads to confusion for the end user.

An important aspect is that allowing the use of the term ‘probiotic’ does not require a change in law. A straightforward change in UK guidance could reclassify ‘probiotic’ and the other ‘biotic’ terms (including prebiotic and postbiotic) as falling within mandatory labelling requirements.

The HFMA has sent an open letter to Yvette Cooper, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, signed by Parliamentarians and industry members, calling on Ministers to review the interpretive guidance and bring the UK practice into line with scientific consensus and comparable countries to allow the responsible and evidence-based information to reach the sections of the population most likely to benefit.

The valid argument that the majority of the public fully understand the term ‘probiotic’ far more readily than perhaps ‘friendly bacteria’ or similar, along with the fact that health professionals including NHS staff readily recommend ‘probiotics’, will hopefully encourage the Secretary of State to push forward the required changes.

I am sure most retailers have multiple customers a week, sent by their GP or nurse to get ‘probiotics’ to go alongside prescribed medication. If they ask advice, they can be recommended the best product. Relying on self-selection and not seeing a product labelled ‘probiotic’ may mean they miss out.

At a recent event, I discussed this with nursing staff. They were all aware of probiotics and frequently recommended them. They were astounded to discover they were asking their patients to look for an item that, while readily available, was potentially difficult to find. Until the guidelines are changed this will be an ongoing issue.

How can you help? Getting in touch with your local MP could be highly valuable. Ask them to consider how it impacts businesses and residents within their constituency. If you would like more information, you can contact the HFMA via hfma@hfma.co.uk.

Hopefully we can look forward to a positive outcome that will support not only the industry but also the health of the population. Watch this space!



We are always happy to discuss how being part of the HFMA can support your business. If you would like to find out more or raise a topic for discussion, please contact us at hfma@hfma.co.uk.