

Food, Nutrition and Health

Public Health Association of New Zealand position statement 2004

- **A balanced diet is essential for good health. Poor nutrition is a major source of ill health and death, and a cause of health inequalities.**
- **Government should develop integrated agriculture, food, marketing and transport policies**
- **Healthy food needs to be affordable for everyone**
- **Health agencies should develop a specific Treaty-Based food and nutrition policy with Maori.**
- **This policy links closely with the PHA policy on breastfeeding**

Adopted by the Council of the PHA of New Zealand on 29 June 2004.

The Public Health Association notes that:

- Nutrition related diseases are the major cause of death in New Zealandⁱ. Nutrition-related disorders stem from both from overweight and obesity and from specific inadequacies^{ii, iii}.
- The burden of these disorders falls disproportionately onto Maori, Pacific people and those on low incomes.
- One fifth of children live in families where food runs out because of money^{iv}
- Young people are the target of food advertising, sponsorship deals and fundraising from companies selling food that do not comply with nutritional guidelines.
- Breastfeeding will contribute positively improving nutrition, reducing obesity, reducing the incidence and impact of cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes^v.

The Public Health Association affirms the following principles:

- Food is used to celebrate life as well as sustain it.
- All New Zealanders should have ready access, in terms of cost, quality and availability, to the basic foods needed for health .
- All New Zealanders should have good knowledge of healthy food choices, particularly in relation to foods common in their culture.
- Children should be protected from damaging commercial exploitation by Government policy frameworks and requirements for responsible food advertising.
- Improving nutrition should be used as a means to reduce health inequalities in New Zealand.
- Food production in New Zealand needs to move to a sustainable basis.
- Protect access to wild foods that are of particular importance to Maori and many other New Zealanders.

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The Public Health Association believes the following steps should be taken:

Government adopts a food policy which integrates agricultural, economic, food production and distribution which reflects social, educational, and environmental factors. This policy should honour the Treaty of Waitangi and enable Maori to achieve nutrition related health objectives. This policy should include:

- Healthy food should be affordable and available to all New Zealanders
- Transport policy that facilitates access to healthy food outlets and opportunities for increased physical activity in our daily lives.
- Serious consideration of a modest tax on foods that are very high in saturated fats (eg, over 25%) or very high in sugar (eg, over 50% free sugars) that is used to support healthy nutrition.
- Food production policy that is environmentally sustainable.
- Environmental protection to ensure sustainable non-commercial harvest of wild foods.

Government should adopt nutrition policies that :

- Require labelling to more clearly identify foods that are high in saturated fat, high in free sugars, have a high glycaemic index, or contain additives with adverse health consequences
- Give serious consideration to providing food vouchers (for buying vegetables and fruit) to low-income New Zealanders.
- Trial providing free high nutrient breakfasts (eg, high protein, high micronutrient smoothies) to children in primary schools serving low-income areas, assessing both health and educational achievement.
- Funds support for healthy eating while respecting community values of hospitality and giving in New Zealand's varied communities
- Limit the promotion of unhealthy foods to children and adolescents, in particular television advertising during children's viewing times should be more tightly regulated with respect to information, messages and meanings /appeals
- Gives serious consideration to taxing food advertisements for those foods that are not compatible with national nutritional guidelines and support children's programme schedules which include a quota of healthy food advertisements or messages
- Restrict sponsorship of sports by foods or food producers not compatible with national nutritional guidelines
- Breastfeeding should be supported (see PHA policy on breastfeeding).

Education and Health Ministries should adopt a joint position that has a coherent school food and nutrition policy covering the health education curriculum, school technology syllabus, school selling of food and drink, and fundraising or sponsorship by schools, particularly in relation to curriculum material provided by food companies.

References

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ⁱ Ministry of Health *Looking Upstream; Causes of death cross classified by risk and condition in New Zealand 1997 PHI Occasional Bulletin 20* Ministry of Health Wellington

ⁱⁱ World Health Organisation Technical Series Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases Report of a WHO Study group Geneva 1990

ⁱⁱⁱ NZ Food: NZ People: Key results of the National Nutrition Survey Ministry of Health 1997.
Key results of the National Nutrition Survey for Maori. Ministry of Health 1999

^{iv} Ministry of Health 2003 *NZ Food NZ Children Key results of the 2002 National Children's Nutritional Survey* Wellington: Ministry of Health

^v Ministry of Health (2002) *Breastfeeding: A guide to Action*