

IASO Press release

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Health experts urge government action on obesity

The International Association for the Study of Obesity (IASO) has today published a 10-point action plan for governments to tackle obesity. The IASO Policy Briefing comes at a time when there is increasing need to tackle the rising levels of obesity and related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in virtually all countries of the world.

“We’ve seen the evidence, we’ve got the strategies, now what we need is action,” said IASO Policy Director, Dr Tim Lobstein.

The proposals come as governments prepare to report on their progress on tackling obesity and NCDs at the United Nations later this year. The Policy Briefing calls on governments to take a systems wide approach to tackling obesity and to work with civil society, especially to monitor the drivers of disease and to hold all stakeholders accountable for progress. It also calls for further steps to be taken to strengthen nutrition security by protecting consumers, primarily children, from inducements to consume unhealthy products.

In preparing their report, IASO gathered experts for a 2-day ‘meeting of the minds’ at the New York Academy of Medicine in September 2013 which brought together officials from the World Health Organization and the OECD, along with local and national government representatives and public health experts, advocacy groups, community activists and some private corporations.

Dr Lobstein, who convened the meeting, said “The result of getting together such a wide group of people was explosive, with some radical proposals to tackle over-consumption, calls for stronger regulation through tough Public Health Acts, and calls for more transparent disclosures of agri-food company lobbying activities and their support for political parties”.

The briefing recommendations include a strong emphasis on government leadership and action in order to reduce preventable deaths while improving economic performance. We call on governments to strengthen their legislative powers so they can intervene in markets for public health purposes.

“Failure to act will not be sustainable, especially in low-income countries” said Dr Lobstein. “We know that governments in low-income countries have little control over the food supplies and trade and investment deals which destroy traditional, healthier diets.

“In isolation governments are reluctant to undertake market interventions as they don’t want to be seen to restrict people’s freedoms. However there is a good case for clear traffic light labelling on products, for banning junk food marketing to children, and for adjusting the existing subsidies and taxes to increase the consumption of healthier foods.”

“As obesity and consequent diseases put increasing strain on health services, governments will have no choice but to act,” he added. “The sooner they start, the cheaper and more effective their actions will be.”

Professor Walter Ricciardi, President of the European Public Health Association, welcomed the report, commenting that "This report shows why governments must act against the drivers of the obesity epidemic, asserting their democratic mandate to defend the health of their populations against powerful vested interests".

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IASO Policy Briefing *The prevention of obesity and NCDs: challenges and opportunities for governments*. Available to journalists [here](#)

Notes

The International Association for the Study of Obesity (IASO) is a not-for-profit organisation linking over 50 regional and national associations with over 30,000 scientific, medical and research professional members in 55 countries. Our mission statement is "To improve global health by promoting the understanding of obesity and weight-related diseases through scientific research and dialogue, whilst encouraging the development of effective policies for their prevention and management." See www.iaso.org

The European Public Health Association is an umbrella organisation for public health associations and institutes in Europe. See www.eupha.org

The Policy Briefing was produced with the International Obesity TaskForce (IOTF), a research-based think tank of international obesity experts. The IOTF represents the advocacy arm of IASO on obesity prevention and policy. See www.iotf.org

The 'meeting of the minds' was held at the New York Academy of the Science 23-24 September 2013. More information is available [here](#) and the programme details are available [here](#).

The 'meeting of the minds' and the production of the Briefing Paper have received support from the Aetna Foundation, based in Hartford, Connecticut, USA, that supports projects to promote wellness, health and access to high quality care for everyone. The views presented here are not necessarily those of the Aetna Foundation, its directors, officers, or staff.

Other sources of information

UN General Assembly (2011). *Political declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases* : http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/66/L.1

World Health Organization (2013) NCD targets: *Follow-up to the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of NCDs*. http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA66-REC1/2.A66_R1_Res10-en.pdf#page=14

UK Overseas Development Institute (2014): *Future Diets*. <http://www.odi.org.uk/future-diets>