



## Healthy Food Environments

### Position Statement

According to the WHO, obesity is a major risk factor for a number of non-communicable diseases including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and some cancers.<sup>1 2</sup> New Zealand has the third highest rate of overweight and obesity for adults and children within OECD countries and in Northland, obesity rates are higher than the New Zealand average, with 37 percent of children and 73 percent of adults being either overweight or obese.<sup>3</sup>

The causes of obesity are extremely complex encompassing biology and behaviour, but set within a cultural, environmental and social framework. Therefore, interventions to prevent the obesity epidemic need to be multifactorial and span from improving the environment that people live, learn, work and play in, to supporting with individuals and whānau with specific needs.<sup>2</sup>

Northland District Health Board supports the strategic objectives of the WHO Ending Childhood Obesity report to:<sup>4</sup>

- Tackle the obesogenic environment and norms (in particular promoting healthy food and active environments)
- Ensure the risk of obesity is reduced by addressing critical elements in the life-course (in particular preconception and antenatal care)
- Treat children already affected by obesity to improve their current and future health.

Northland District Health Board supports and advocates for strategies and initiatives that address the obesogenic environment and help make the healthy choice the easy choice. This position statement has been developed in order to support Northland District Health Board advocate for healthier food environments within both the Northland region and at a national level.

Northland DHB is committed to ensuring equity of access, experience and outcomes for those populations who need our support the most. This is particularly so for Māori in Northland to recognise their status as Tangata Whenua. Our position on this matter aligns with our commitment to eliminate inequities and should be read in conjunction with our overall approach to achieving optimal health and wellbeing for all Northlanders

#### **Northland District Health Board advocates for:**

- Strengthening the government's Childhood Obesity Plan to align with the major recommendations from the WHO Commission on Childhood Obesity
- Implementing effective central government policies to reduce exposure to children from unhealthy food marketing
- The mandatory introduction of healthy food and drink policies in schools, early childhood learning environments and any other government funded child care facilities
- Building healthy public policy to promote healthy eating and water-only sports events, sugar free campaigns and healthy food workplaces
- Creating supportive environments to promote access to free drinking water, good recreational spaces and building transport infrastructure to enable active transport
- Strengthening community actions to develop low cost access to fruit and vegetables and through the opportunity to grow their own vegetables and support Kaupapa Māori initiatives that focus on wellness and healthy eating
- Developing personal skills through providing services that enable parents to strengthen skills and lead their family in healthy eating behaviour and to develop active lifestyles
- DHBs to review and implement their healthy food policies and apply consistently across New Zealand
- The investigation of an effective sugar sweetened beverage levy along with the reduced availability and consumption of sugary drinks
- Accelerate reformulation initiatives by industry to reduce sugar, salt and fat in food, using regulations rather than relying on voluntary agreements

- Introduce plain packaging for confectionary, crisps and high sugar products
- Review the health star rating system.

**Northland District Health Board supports:**

- Initiatives to ensure healthy food is provided where people live, learn, work and play in (e.g. early childhood education services, schools, sport and recreational centres, workplaces, health care facilities, marae)
- Local government initiatives to improve the food environment in their communities, particularly around children's settings and within the lower socioeconomic areas
- Initiatives to encourage the normalisation of breastfeeding, to improve breastfeeding rates, the duration of breastfeeding and increasing breastfeeding friendly spaces.

**References**

1. Population-based approaches to Childhood Obesity Prevention. 2012: World Health Organisation, 2012.
2. Darnton-Hill I NC, James WPT. A life course approach to diet, nutrition and the prevention of chronic diseases. *Public Health Nutrition* 2004;7(1A):101-21.
3. Regional Data Explorer 2014-17: New Zealand Health Survey: Ministry of Health, 2018.
4. Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity. Geneva: World Health Organisation, 2016.