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Media Release – NZ Government Rolls Out Plan for Reducing Childhood Obesity
From: NZ Register of Exercise Professionals



NZ Government Rolls Out Plan for Reducing Childhood Obesity

The Government has unveiled a comprehensive plan tackling childhood obesity by implementing and supporting a number of health, nutrition, activity and education programmes.

The Minister of Health Dr Jonathan Coleman placed a focus on encouraging the public to change through education and motivation for change, rather than through taxing sugary drinks and products which has been an ongoing suggestion.

"Childhood obesity is a serious issue which means some of our kids could end up living shorter lives than their parents," Dr Coleman said.

The plan looks at providing nutrition and health education to New Zealanders at risk through 22 initiatives which are a mix of new initiatives, and an expansion of existing services grouped into three key themes:

- **Targeted interventions for those who are obese**
- **Increased support for those at risk of becoming obese**
- **Broad strategies to make healthier choices easier**

Targeted initiatives include Before School Check (B4SC) referrals for 4 year olds to ensure positive and sustained effects on health. Families referred through the B4SC programme will also have improved access to nutrition and physical activity programmes.

The Government also plans to increase support to programmes that encourage low participating groups to get more physically active, combined with clinical guidance for weight management in New Zealand children.

Screening for gestational diabetes will continue and increase with referrals to Green Prescription for pregnant women at risk of diabetes. A Green Prescription (GRx) is a health professional's written advice to a patient to be physically active, as part of the patient's health management. Engagement in physical activity is an important part of any health and weight management plan, as getting active has benefits not just in weight management, but also in social support, mental health and other health outcomes.

The plan also includes a number of other initiatives that work with the broader community and stakeholders such as schools, the food industry, and District Health Boards (DHBs).

The Ministry of Health has previously highlighted the need for focus on childhood obesity, as obese children are more likely to carry their excess weight into adulthood. This increases the likelihood of health conditions including Type 2 diabetes, ischaemic heart disease (IHD), stroke, several common cancers, osteoarthritis, sleep apnoea and reproductive abnormalities.

This plan shows the NZ Government is following an international lead. The World Health Organisation released the Interim Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity for comment earlier this year. In this report the Commission identified key issues including addressing risk factors for childhood obesity from before conception, through pregnancy and throughout childhood. The report highlights the need to address the obesigenic environment that surrounds young people.

It outlined potential policy options that governments could consider “to reduce the intake of unhealthy foods and non-alcoholic beverages, increase the intake of healthy foods and promote physical activity in children and adolescents.” The NZ Health and Sport Minister Dr Coleman has come under criticism for not placing more pressure on the food and beverage industry in his plan.

Dr Colman has confirmed the role that exercise and physical activity plays in the childhood obesity plan stating that, “It’s also important that we encourage people to get active.” *“Community programmes such as Healthy Families NZ will continue to roll out around the country, while other programmes will be enhanced so they are better targeted to provide nutrition and activity support and advice to those who need it most.”*

REPs Registered Exercise Professionals and industry organisations are supportive of any developments in the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders, with many exercise facilities and professionals already providing activities for young people, as well as ongoing support for exercising adults.

REPs Registrar Stephen Gacsal knows that the nationwide network of REPs Registered Exercise Professionals and Facilities can play a valuable role in supporting this new government initiative. He comments that *“with a network of over 2500 registered exercise professionals, and 200 facilities throughout New Zealand, REPs professionals have the knowledge and skill to support children and younger adults to maintain a healthy lifestyle through structured exercise and activity”*.

Reference:

You can read the full plan at this link:

<http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/obesity/childhood-obesity-plan>

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Who is the NZ Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs)?

REPs is an independent non profit organisation administering the New Zealand exercise professionals register to ensure that the public receive safe and effective exercise advice.

Using REPs Registered Exercise Professionals is the “Warrant of Fitness Check” that exercise professionals and facilities meet New Zealand and internationally benchmarked standards to deliver exercise advice and instruction.

REPs is affiliated globally to other national exercise professional registers representing over 210,000 exercise professionals through the International Confederation of Registers for Exercise Professionals (ICREPs) - www.icreps.org

