



Cancer Society New Zealand
Te Kāhui Matepukupuku o Aotearoa

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Fags and Fat: Nutrition sector looks to learn from smokefree successes

Tobacco control and obesity prevention experts gather in Wellington tomorrow at the *Fags and Fat* seminar to discuss how to reduce New Zealand's high rates of obesity.

Cancer Society Health Promotion Manager Dr Jan Pearson says that with one in three New Zealand adults overweight and one in four obese, we need to learn from the successes in tobacco control.

“Changing the environment to support non-smokers and make it harder for people to smoke has been a big factor in the reduction in smoking rates we have seen over the past decades. These environmental changes include advertising bans, making it more difficult for young people to access cigarettes, long-term communications campaigns about the dangers of smoking and offering quit help and support, and increasing the price of tobacco.

“We need to make similar environmental changes to support people to make healthy decisions when it comes to food. However, unfortunately the current focus is solely on personal responsibility and choice.

“To make a healthy choice you need to have objective information and an environment that makes that choice easy. At the moment, however, we are bombarded with ads for high fat, high sugar, high salt foods, which are cheap, and available on virtually every street corner.

“It's like telling a smoker not to smoke, then putting them in a room full of smokers, and giving them a carton of cigarettes.”

Dr Pearson says the focus on personal choice suits fast food and advertising companies down to the ground.

“They keep making their profits, at the expense of people's health.”

She is calling for some clear policy direction from the Government on obesity prevention.

“In the past 12 months we have seen the requirement to have healthy food in school cafes removed, health promotion support for the Fruit in School Programme taken away, and virtually all the funding for healthy eating programmes disappear.

“We would like to know what the Government is going to put in the place of these programmes to proactively address obesity rates.”

She says there is strong international evidence that the new focus on physical activity alone will be ineffective in reducing obesity rates unless food intake is also targeted.

“An increase in physical activity, while a positive thing in itself, won’t offset a poor diet. It takes hours of hard-out activity to counteract just one meal in a fast-food restaurant.

“Tomorrow we will look at what worked to reduce tobacco use and consider how similar strategies might help fight the obesity epidemic.”

Media are welcome to attend the seminar and can contact Dr Jan Pearson, Health Promotion Manager, Cancer Society on 0274 517 359.

Media liaison person on the day is Celia Murphy, 021 232 7519.

Fags and Fat is presented by the Cancer Society, Health Promotion and Policy Research Unit - Otago University, Quigley and Watts, Fight the Obesity Epidemic, and the Obesity Action Coalition.

It is being held at the Nordmeyer Theatre, Level D, School of Medicine and Health Services Building, University of Otago, 23a Mein St, Newtown, Wellington, from 9am to 2.30pm.

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Two papers from the conference:

The industries today and how we move forward - by Boyd Swinburn

Tobacco and Food - Similarities and differences - by Robert Beaglehole