



NATIONAL PARTY'S REPOSE TO OBESITY ISSUES SLAMMED BY HEALTH GROUPS

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The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) and Public Health Association (PHA) have slammed the National Party's response to rising obesity rates. In the Health Committee Inquiry into Obesity and Type 2 diabetes report, the National Party put forward different views from the rest of the Committee on a number of issues.

OAC Director Leigh Sturgiss says the report shows that while most parties understand the need to change the environment to combat obesity, the National Party has chosen to follow an education-only approach known to be ineffective.

"The report quite clearly states that education alone is not the answer, so why does the National Party insist on revisiting this failed approach to public health initiatives?"

PHA Director Dr Gay Keating says the Committee heard submissions from over 300 individuals and organisations.

"The majority of the Committee, from a range of parties, have put aside party differences, looked at the evidence and come up with a multi-pronged plan to attack this complex problem.

"It is extremely disappointing that the Committee members from the National Party have chosen to turn this into a party political event. They have taken a political stance and have turned their back on the evidence that we need to do more than just tell people to do something different."

Leigh Sturgiss compares the issue of obesity to that of tobacco use.

"A range of strong tobacco control measures, including legislation and regulations, have seen smoking rates come down. The same strategies will work for obesity. Education on its own did not work for tobacco – it won't work for obesity.

"The National Party seems to be blaming ethnic groups for 'cultural' attitudes towards food, which is a cop-out. Cultural attitudes to food have been around for centuries, the obesity epidemic is new. We know from research that all population groups are getting fatter, not just Māori and Pacific peoples."

Both OAC and the PHA say it is living in an 'obesogenic' environment – in which it is easier to take the car to the shops than to walk; quicker to buy takeaways than to cook; and in which children are constantly bombarded with ads for high sugar, high fat foods – that is the problem.

“These are the things we need to address if we are to protect the next generation from obesity, type 2 diabetes, and obesity-related illnesses and death,” says Leigh Sturgiss.

“The National Party’s call just for education is actually a call for no action to be taken. For the advertising and food industries, this means business as usual. For New Zealanders it means increasing rates of obesity.”

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