

Growing appetite for major salt shake-up in Australia

Health experts are today calling for governments, food manufacturers and public health bodies to work together to reformulate food and improve food labelling to reduce salt intake and save lives.

With almost one in 20 deaths in Victoria attributable to high salt intake, health experts are meeting at the Australian Health Policy Collaboration Forum (AHPCF) in Melbourne to discuss salt intake as one of seven topics requiring action to reduce the burden of disease, the focus will today turn to how to reduce the salt intake of Australian adults and children who consume well above the recommended sodium levels.

Key members of the VicHealth Salt Reduction Partnership will attend the AHPC Forum to assess current progress against the World Health Organisation's target to reduce Australia's salt intake by 30 per cent by 2025.

VicHealth's Programs Director Dr Bruce Bolam said that significant reform is necessary to reduce the amount of salt in processed and packaged foods and reduce the sodium intake of Australians.

"Processed foods are a major contributor to high salt intake and product reformulation to reduce the amount of sodium in packaged foods is necessary if we're going to reduce the burden of disease and achieve the World Health Organization's target," Dr Bolam, who chaired the AHPC salt group said.

"There is a growing understanding of the health risks associated with excessive salt consumption and now is the time to work collaboratively to make the most of this momentum. Salt reduction is a feasible, efficient and cost-effective way to reduce the chronic disease burden in Australia throughout the next decade."

"The Federal Government's recently announced Healthy Food Partnership is a timely example of how we can work together to do more on reducing sodium levels in food through the Health Star Rating System. It's an important opportunity to use product reformulation to reduce the salt intake of Australian adults and children," Dr Bolam said.

Dr Jacqui Webster, Director of the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre on Population Salt Reduction at the George Institute in Sydney said: "The Australian government signed up to the global salt reduction targets in 2013 acknowledging the potential to save thousands of lives a year through reductions in heart disease and strokes. We now need a coordinated strategy with government, public health groups and the food industry to achieve these targets".

Rosemary Calder, Director of the Australian Health Policy Collaboration, said reducing Australia's mean salt intake by 30% by 2025 is challenging but entirely feasible.

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“Reducing our salt intake by 30% would result in 3500 fewer deaths a year from strokes and heart attacks, and save millions of dollars to the healthcare system.”

The Salt Reduction Strategic Partnership includes VicHealth, The George Institute, Deakin University's Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research (C-PAN), Heart Foundation and the National Stroke Foundation.

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Note to editors

- Reducing salt intake is part of VicHealth’s plan to get 200,000 Victorians adopting a healthier diet by 2023.

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