

Regional Action Framework on Protecting Children from the Harmful Impact of Food Marketing in the Western Pacific



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on Protecting Children from
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in the Western Pacific**

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ABBREVIATIONS

BMS	breast-milk substitutes
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	civil society organization
ECHO	Ending Childhood Obesity
NCD	noncommunicable disease
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PICs	Pacific island countries and areas
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

FOREWORD

Decades of rapid economic growth, urbanization and globalization have led to tremendous changes in the food environment, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Processed foods with little nutritional value but high in fat, sugar and salt are now readily available and heavily marketed, especially to children. This unhealthy food environment negatively influences child dietary patterns, driving increases in childhood overweight and obesity in the Region.

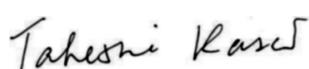
Member States expressed deep concern over the harmful impact of food marketing to children during the 2017 session of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Committee for the Western Pacific. They decided that action must be taken to foster healthy food environments for children, starting with addressing the harmful impact of widespread marketing of breast-milk substitutes and food high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars or salt. This commitment to the health of the Region's children carried through the Member State consultations to develop *For the Future: Towards the Healthiest and Safest Region* – the Region's vision for health and WHO's work in the coming years.

To help guide the actions on food marketing, the Regional Committee endorsed the *Regional Action Framework on Protecting Children from the Harmful Impact of Food Marketing in the Western Pacific* in October 2019. This Framework is the product of extensive consultations with Member States, key stakeholders and other experts, and reflects their valuable experiences and insights.

The Framework is comprised of four pillars for action – a policy framework, multisectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration, advocacy and communication, and monitoring and evaluation – and 10 recommended actions. In this way, Member States can tailor actions to suit their needs and priorities.

Moving forward, we are committed to leverage all levels of WHO – from country and regional offices to headquarters – to support country-specific actions to improve the food environment for children through multisectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Our goal of making the Western Pacific the world's healthiest and safest region starts with making children healthier and safer. Protecting them from the harmful impact of food marketing is an important step in that direction.

Thank you for helping us to reach this goal.



Takeshi Kasai, MD, Ph.D.
Regional Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rapid economic growth, urbanization and globalization have changed the food system in the World Health Organization (WHO) Western Pacific Region, making inexpensive processed foods more available and accessible. Now more than ever, children are being exposed to potential harm from the marketing¹ of breast-milk substitutes (BMS) and food² high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars or salt.

Evidence shows that marketing of BMS³ and food high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars or salt influences children's food preferences, requests and consumption, and is a major contributor to overweight and obesity, which is rising in the Region and affecting most Member States. There has been considerable progress in reducing childhood under-nutrition in the Region. Yet, there were still 2.6 million children under 5 years of age who were wasted and 7.7 million who were stunted in the Region in 2018. The proportion of exclusive breastfeeding in the Region remains low, at or below 30% over the past 10 years, with two out of three infants under 6 months of age not receiving the protective benefits of exclusive breastfeeding. Meanwhile, childhood obesity has increased significantly in the Region, affecting most Member States, to become a serious public health challenge in the 21st century. It is estimated that more than 7.2 million children aged under 5 years were overweight in 2018, and 84 million children aged 5–19 years were overweight or obese in 2016 – a 43% increase for children aged 5–19 years in just six years, ending in 2016.

Despite Member States' efforts, marketing of BMS, inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children, and marketing of food high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars or salt are widespread across the Western Pacific Region. Concerned with this situation and the rising threat of overweight and obesity, the WHO Regional

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