Translating research into policy: advocacy and communicating with policymakers

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Overview

• Advisory group memberships (experience)
• Some definitions
• Strategic science with policy impact
• Case study of efforts to influence policy in NZ (SSB tax)
• Recommendations
• **Current advisory group memberships**
  – Food Standards Australia New Zealand Social Sciences & Economics Advisory Group
  – New Zealand Health Star Rating (front-of-pack labelling) Advisory Group
  – National District Health Board Healthy Food Policy Nutrient Criteria Working Group

• **Past advisory group memberships**
  – Ministry of Heath Childhood Obesity Technical Advisory Group
  – Food Standards Australia New Zealand Consumer & Public Health Dialogue
  – Health Promotion Agency Nutrition and Physical Activity Expert Advisory Group
  – Heart Foundation of New Zealand Food & Nutrition Working Group
  – Ministry of Health Stakeholders Advisory Group for Food and Beverage Classification System for Schools
Definitions

• Public Policy
  – Declared State objectives relating to the health, morals, and well being of the citizenry

• Policymaker
  – Member of a government department who is responsible for making new rules, laws, etc.

• Advocacy
  – Public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy
Strategic science with policy impact

• Only a small proportion of research has policy impact

• Identify change agents and develop two-way engagement
  – Politicians, policymakers, media, non-government organisations, global institutions (e.g. WHO)

• Know what is important to change agents (strategic questions)
  – Examples include impacts of competing policy approaches to a problem, costs of implementation, public support for a policy

Figure: A model of strategic science designed to enhance links between science and policy

Evidence-based guidance on obesity
## Remarkable consistency in policy recommendations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Recommendation</th>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>Lancet</th>
<th>NZMA</th>
<th>OECD</th>
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Remarkable consistency in policy recommendations
NZ Childhood Obesity Plan

Targeted initiatives
1. Childhood obesity health target – B4SC referrals
2. Access to nutrition and physical activity programmes for families eg. Active Families

Increased support
3. KiwiSport will have a greater focus on low participation groups
4. Guidance for weight management in children and young people
5. Guidance for healthy weight gain in pregnancy
6. Gestational diabetes guidelines
7. Referrals to GRx for pregnant women (at risk of gestational diabetes)

Broad population approaches
8. Health star rating promotion
9. Marketing and advertising to children
10. Partnership with industry
11. Information and resources for general public
12. Public awareness campaign
13. PlaySport
14. Physical activity guidelines for under 5s
15. Sport in education programme expansion
16. Prime Minister’s Education Excellence Award
17. Teachers’ professional learning and development
18. ERO report on schools
19. Health promoting schools
20. Healthy Families NZ
21. DHB healthy food policies
22. Eating and activity guidelines (adults)
## Alignment of NZ Childhood Obesity Plan with policy recommendations

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SSB taxes around the world

• Implemented
  – OECD (France, Hungary, Mexico)
  – South America (Chile)
  – Caribbean (Barbados, Dominica)
  – Pacific countries and territories (13/21)
  – USA (23 states and city of Berkeley)

• Impending
  – UK, South Africa, Philadelphia

• Considering
  – Ireland, Colombia, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Philippines
Results from Mexico

1 peso/L tax (≈10%)

6% average decrease in SSB sales

4% increase in bottled water sales

Colchero et al, BMJ 2016
Sustained effects 2 years post-implementation

Colchero et al, *Health Affairs* 2017
Building a case for a SSB tax in New Zealand

RESEARCH ARTICLE
Effects of Health-Related Food Taxes and Subsidies on Mortality from Diet-Related Disease in New Zealand: An Econometric-Epidemiologic Modelling Study

Cliona Ni Mhurchu¹*, Helen Eyles¹, Murat Genç², Peter Scarborough³, Mike Rayner³, Anja Mizdrak³, Kelechi Nnoaham⁴, Tony Blakely⁴

Food Prices and Consumer Demand: Differences across Income Levels and Ethnic Groups

Cliona Ni Mhurchu¹*, Helen Eyles¹, Chris Schilling², Qing Yang², William Kaye-Blake², Murat Genç³, Tony Blakely⁴
Exploring stakeholder support for SSB tax

• 20 semi-structured interviews with politicians, bureaucrats, public health experts, food industry leaders and consumer representatives
• Strong support for starting with a SSBs tax, possibly framed around protecting children and dental health
Estimating revenue from SSB tax

- $40M/year – Carbonated and diet beverages
- $30M/year – Carbonated SSB only
- $30M+/year - All sweetened beverages e.g. sports drinks, energy drinks, fruit juice, cordials

Ni Mhurchu et al, NZ Med J 2014
Evidence versus ideology

Public Health Expert

An open letter to Cabinet Ministers from 74 health professors calling for a sugary drinks tax

Posted on April 2, 2016 by TONY BLAKELY

In this Public Health Expert blog, we reproduce a letter that appeared in the NZ Herald on 2 April 2016. Professors Boyd Swinburn, Rod Jackson, and Cliona Ni Mhurchu led the writing.

Implications of a Sugar Tax in New Zealand: Incidence and Effectiveness

Alasdair Gardiner

New Zealand Treasury Working Paper 16/09

Sugar Taxes and Changes in Total Calorie Consumption: A Simple Framework

John Creedy

New Zealand Treasury Working Paper 16/06
An announcement by the UK Government it will implement a tax on soft-drinks spurred calls for the tax in New Zealand.

New Zealand public health advocates are celebrating the United Kingdom Government’s move to tax soft-drinks but others remain unconvinced, including Health Minister Jonathan Coleman.

“Our position on a sugar tax hasn’t changed – it’s not something we’re actively considering,” Coleman said in a statement.

He said the Government would “keep a watching brief on the emerging evidence”.

March 2016
Some wins too 😊
Recommendations

• Develop two-way engagement with change agents
  – Sit on advisory groups
  – Network at conferences and events
  – Write to your local representatives
  – Offer exclusives to journalists you respect
  – Understand the system and the constraints agents operate within

• Address gaps in knowledge that are important to politicians and policymakers

• Identify priorities for action and speak with one voice

• Deliver strong, simple messages across multiple media (academic papers, media releases, presentations, policy briefs, blogs, letters to the editor etc.)
Thank you

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