

# **FIFTH MEETING OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP ON NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

2<sup>ND</sup> APRIL 2009 10.00-17.00  
CENTRE DE CONFERENCE ALBERT BORSCHETTE

## **MINUTES**

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### **1. AGENDA AND MINUTES**

The agenda and minutes of the previous meeting were adopted.

### **2. OUTCOMES OF LAST PLATFORM MEETING**

The minutes of the Platform meeting on 19 November 2008 were distributed for information purposes.

#### **2.1 Case study on Impact of the European Platform for action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health** presented by M. Rosenmöller, IESE Business School

DG SANCO commissioned this case study which explores the sustainability of the Platform, its challenges (tense relationships among stakeholders, different focus, commitment fatigue), strengths (speed, higher awareness of nutrition, more efficient), reasons for companies to join (concretise their existing plans, make visible what they are doing, threat of regulation, incentives to change the way business is done), and barriers to business participation (selling it internally in the company, fit with the business model, cost of monitoring efforts).

The companies interviewed (mainly food and drink companies, restaurant associations) highlighted the role of the Platform as a catalyst for getting management buy-in for activities and an opportunity to develop relationships with stakeholders. Many of them had already started working on healthier food ranges based on consumer demand, and it is difficult to separate out the impact of the Platform on this trend. However, there have been real advances in reformulation and which have been actioned much faster than getting it through EU legislation. The study concluded that good practice for this type of project requires trust, a sense of urgency, the presence of NGOs, all partners committing to deliver without control of content, recognition of efforts.

In keeping with SANCO's undertaking to ensure that the input from the Platform is shared with the HLG, this is a preview of the case study which will be presented to the Platform on 3 April 2009. The case study was a short, specific exercise to look at the motivation of the commercial partners for joining the Platform. There is a separate, much larger monitoring and evaluation process on the EU Strategy, which will include an evaluation of the Platform, and will answer many of the additional questions on effectiveness of the Platform which have been raised by HLG members. There will be a steering committee which will define the questions for the Terms of Reference for the evaluation of the Platform. Two seats in this committee will be reserved for HLG members which will require a time commitment for two meetings – June and September. France and Slovenia expressed interest in participating in the steering committee.

### **3. SALT REDUCTION INITIATIVES**

Updates were reported by the Commission and Member States on activities in this area:

SANCO has received a response to a questionnaire on salt from 25 countries. The data has been put into a table outlining the lowest achievable levels of salt for the main food categories that will be included in the EU salt reduction framework. However, the data submitted by some Member States appears to have been taken from the average of their national food composition tables rather than specific products. In addition

further clarification is needed for some food items. Member States are invited to review and verify the data by 15 May and if there are no objections, SANCO will publish the information. Comments and feedback to be sent Stephanie Bodenbach, copied to Annette Goddard. By 2009, Member States should have their own salt reduction framework in place. SANCO is also preparing communication material about why a salt initiative is needed to enhance public awareness but it should be noted that this is not a pan European campaign. Member States will also have an opportunity to comment on the draft communication materials. SANCO has made contact with the [World Hypertension League](#) to explore ways of highlighting the EU salt reduction campaign on World Hypertension day on 17 May.

SANCO has met with Platform member CIAA (whose members include Nestle, Belgian and German food associations) to talk about salt reduction within the framework of EU nutrition strategy. CIAA were encouraged to contact the HLG focal points to discuss how they could support national salt reduction activities. When Commissioner Vassiliou met the trade association of confectionary companies to discuss nutrient profiles, she took the opportunity to emphasize that EU priority on salt reduction.

SANCO participated in a national roundtable meeting on salt in Spain. SANCO has also invited to showcase the EU salt framework at a multi-stakeholder meeting in Canada. SANCO has met with the medical devices industry to ask for their help in developing tools to measure salt in blood and urine. They will address this issue at their CEOs meeting in Paris in June 2009.

**Spain** – Three meetings have taken place on the strategies on nutrition, physical activity and health, details of which are available on the website of the Spanish agency for nutrition. A voluntary agreement with the relevant trade associations has a target of a 16 % salt reduction in bread by the end of 2009. More concrete initiatives in the salt reduction plan will be developed for the Spanish Presidency in 2010.

**UK** –The UK salt reduction programme is ongoing. A revision to the targets set in 2006 will be agreed by the Minister and published in May 2009. Stage 4 of the consumer awareness campaign will go live in October 2009 on food.gov.uk. The UK is willing to share its results and experience with other countries.

**FR** – The government has accepted proposals from several manufacturers to reduce salt by 10-15 %, thresholds will be proposed for specific food categories. Bread is a large part of the diet of many countries and an important cultural reference point. When salt campaigns are carried out, bread should not be classified as a ‘negative’ food item. In the next few months there will be a consumer information campaign on TV and internet on food products that is HFSS (High in Fat, Sugar and Salt).

**EL** – A National Committee on nutrition comprising government and industry, decided last year to focus on salt in bread, following the EPIC study showing that this is associated with higher blood pressure in the population. Bread is mostly produced in thousands of small shops, there is no large central industry. Each baker has their own method and equipment and, although there are recipes, they tend to add salt on taste. The Ministry will thus need to test a representative sample of breads from across the country to get a clearer picture of the salt content.

**BU** – In Bulgaria there has been support from NGOs and medical professionals salt reduction because it is an EU endorsed approach. However, assistance is needed at EU level with the associations of bread-makers, because almost 50% of sodium in diet comes from bread. A few years ago, the government started working on books of recipes for schools, canteens, restaurants etc and required food makers to explore how to cut salt.

**IE** – The Food Safety Authority has worked on salt since 2004, particularly in bread where salt has been reduced by about 10%. A national steering group and two national workshops have drafted a framework based on the 5 principles in the EU salt initiatives. Catering and retailers will be the first priority. There is no money for new campaigns, but will piggyback on other initiatives such as the world hypertension day.

**IT** –The Government is working with the bread making industry, both large and small producers, with a target of 10% salt reduction by 2010. The type of bread is a factor – a table has been produced with guideline parameters for each type. Industry have agreed to monitor activities, reduction and effect. On 17

April, Italy will have a national health day which will focus on proper diet including fruit and vegetables and salt reduction. A field study in Umbria and Tuscany indicates the positive impact of a measurable reduction in CVD after several years of 'no salt bread' in these regions.

**NL** – The food industry has launched a task force to cut salt by 12 % by 2010 compared to 2007 levels. The longer term goal is a reduction of 20-30%. There is no specific focus on the 4 food categories because it is seen as a general re-education of consumer's palates, across all food product types. National food surveys and urine excretion studies are planned for 2010.

**DK** – The government has met with the cheese, bread and meat producers and found a broadly positive response to the benchmarks, although many small bakers use salt with a 'loose hand'. In January 2009 a programme was started to encourage the use of wholegrains in the bread industry, but it is difficult to combine this with salt reduction. 70% of salt intake comes from industrially produced food. A research programme (co-financed by meat industry and government) will explore how much salt can be reduced and results will be available within two years. There are no plans for a specific public campaign on salt because it is already included in general nutrition campaigns (keyhole system).

**HU** – At end of 2008, the government spoke to the national association of bakeries about salt reduction and received a mixed reaction. Some said it was impossible, others, that they have already been doing this for a number of years. The food producers association have been asked to send their most popular products (<100) including bread, meat and fast food items for analysis of salt and trans fat content. The government is also working with CVD prevention groups.

**OS** – At the beginning of 2009, government met with the food producers but did not receive a good response, even to a request for data. There is resistance to directions from EU level about salt in bread and other health claims. Some bakers are working on a product that is 'good for the heart'.

**DE** – The government faces several hurdles to reduce salt in bread, not least the huge diversity in bread types and small producers. There is also a culinary tradition of using unsalted butter, which can make low-salt bread unpalatable. A 3 year study to look at salt/sodium intake and verify against blood pressure will produce interim results by 2010. A national programme started last year on physical activity and healthy eating with the prospect to last up to 2020, but there are no plans at present to do a specific salt campaign.

**NO** – Salt was tackled as part of the 2007 nutrition plan which included consumer awareness, there are no plans for a separate information campaign. The government has created a forum for dialogue with industry and consumers, in which salt reduction will be discussed. The 'keyhole' system will be brought in this year which will include a specific target on salt.

**FI** – The 20 year work on salt reduction is ongoing. Compulsory labelling of certain food categories will be broader, and the warning label threshold for salt is going down as of 1 June 2009. If salt content is now more than 1.2g of Sodium Chloride for 100g of bread, it will trigger a "high salt" label (in the early 1990s, it was 1.7g). Industry is working hard for reformulate in order to avoid the high salt label. The next step will focus on food in work canteens and schools, making recommendations for food services (by end 2009) and procurement guidelines for public authorities on salt, fibre, sugar and saturated fat. For example, removing subsidies for school meals with high salt or fat contents. Some NGOs and food safety authorities are conducting campaigns on how to read the labels of food items and identify healthy products. The government is keen to work on other nutrients.

**SI** – The government has held 5 meetings with industry as part of a national salt reduction plan. It is a difficult process, and target setting is challenging. Support from EU industry associations was helpful in moving the national trade groups. A national food consumption survey will be conducted and an awareness campaign is planned.

**CY** – There is a national committee to reduce salt, and National Nutrition Day this year (10 May) will focus on salt, followed by a 15 day campaign on TV to discuss the health link between salt and CVD. A

meeting with industry has shown some willingness to work on reducing salt, although Cyprus also faces the challenge of small artisanal bakeries.

**BE** – The government has regulated salt in bread since the 1980s. The current limit is 2% of dry matter. 70% of bread was within the limit in 2008. The use of iodised salt will be included within the guidelines.

**CH** – Last year the government approved the national plan on physical activity and nutrition which covers salt. A target has been set of a 16 % average reduction by 2012 across different food categories – bread, cheese and processed food. There will be a national platform on physical activity and nutrition and salt will be a high priority with its own working group. A joint campaign on blood pressure is planned including the Federal Agency for health, doctors and pharmacies, the Swiss heart foundation.

**PT** – There have been some measures to reduce salt in bread. They are interested in talking to other countries about experience of whether lower salt bread is compensated by the use of salted butter or higher salt cheese?

Chair's concluding points from the discussion:

- France has demonstrated a way to monitor consumption based on salt sales. This is an interesting approach as a potential indicator of progress
- All relevant documents submitted by Member States can be loaded onto CIRCA as a knowledge sharing tool. Studies, documents and other materials are very welcome.
- 17/05 – World Hypertension day - is an opportunity for EU and Member States to address salt.
- Several Member States are keen to tackle sugar and fat, SANCO will initiate a first discussion on these nutrients at the next HLG in July. However, the priority is to complete salt actions first and use experience gained to facilitate the sugar/fat actions.
- The experience of Switzerland on how industry can be enthusiastic and involved and the learning from Austria about healthy breads could be usefully shared.
- Mutual learning is important, there is added value of participation by EU level organisations in national discussions.
- The issue of iodized salt needs more discussion and will be addressed at the July meeting.

#### SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE EUROPEAN SALT ACTION NETWORK MEETING

This body held its second meeting in UK in February. 16 of the 22 countries that attended are EU states, Canada also joined the meeting. The network has developed documentation to help countries with their salt work, how to engage industry, monitoring through urine sodium analysis, consumer awareness and levels of salt in food. Communication approaches were discussed and this will be developed into a new 'how to' guide. Researchers led discussions on the problems/options of reducing salt in meat and dairy products. The next meeting in the second half of 2009 will look at salt replacers, salt intakes in children, raising public awareness, recent research on salt replacement cereals and snacks.

#### **4. STRATEGY MONITORING FRAMEWORK** presented by Tom Ling

The EU Strategy was adopted in 2007 with a commitment to produce a progress report in 2010. To prepare this monitoring report, information is being gathered from several sources including HLG, EU Platform, WHO, National Focal Points. The process of measuring progress is a complex and broad project spanning several Commission units. Work has begun to develop a framework which will be presented for endorsement by Member States at the July meeting.

The aim is not to duplicate or create new indicators but to build on the existing structures. The European Commission is financing a project with the WHO Euro office to merge all of the information sources into a central database which will be working by the end of 2009. Reflections are needed on the indicators and framework for monitoring. RAND Europe were asked to investigate to find the sources potential sources of information such as DAFNE, ECCHI. Member States invited to review carefully the document produced by RAND, to comment on the selection of the indicators from the different data sources. The aim is to ensure the collection of comparable and meaningful data that can inform policy development. An

important element to note is that monitoring needs to go beyond data and look impacts on population health. Further discussion will take place in July.

## **5. MEMBER STATES DEVELOPMENTS**

### **The Cross-Government Strategy to Combat Obesity in England plus Report Back on a London Meeting on Priorities for Cross-European Working** presented by Dr Will Cavendish

The UK government has an ambition to be the first major nation to reverse the rising tide of obesity and overweight, specifically, by 2020, to reduce the proportion of overweight children to 2000 levels. The Department of Health is developing a 'Coalition for better health' with industry, NGO and other partners to agree actions and goals. Every 4 and 11 year old is weighed for obesity in order to build a good tracking system. The results are often a shock to the parents. Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives is a multi-million pound strategy with 5 major themes.

1. Children – advice and guidance for ante/post natal care, breastfeeding, sure start, healthy schools
2. Promoting healthier food choices – food labelling, portion size, reduced marketing of HFSS, reducing contradictory messages, Common priority in promoting healthy food choices
3. Building physical activity into everyday life, e.g. free swimming for those under 16 and over 60. Physical activity is still a major challenge, it needs to be brought back into urban planning.
4. Creating incentives for better health, working with large companies to understand the cost of obesity,
5. Personalised advice and support – every adult between 40-74 will be checked for BMI and smoking and referred to the relevant services.

#### **Priorities for Cross-European Working / EU Value added:**

- Common measures across the EU including monitoring and surveillance
- Value of HLG and EU in ensuring that obesity remains an administrative priority across Europe
- Priorities for physical activities promotion
- Tackle the influence of the car industry
- Common research framework
- Better connection between academic and research networks

#### **Belgium national strategy and initiatives** was presented by Laurence Doughan

A National Food and Health Plan was launched in April 2006 covering reformulation, information and awareness campaigns, data collection and monitoring tools. It has 7 nutrition objectives:

1. Achieve a balance in energy input and output and a healthy weight
2. Consume at least 400 g of fruits and vegetables per day
3. Decrease the number of people eating insufficient quantities of fruits and vegetables (especially amongst young people)
4. Decrease energy consumption from fats to 35% of total energy intake. Improve the nutritional quality of fats in the diet
5. Increase carbohydrate intake (to min 50% of total energy intake) composed preferably of complex carbohydrate sources - Limit intake of added sugars - Increase intake of dietary fibre
6. Reduce salt intake. Replace salt with iodised salt
7. Increase water consumption

And 7 strategic themes:

1. Information and communication
2. Creating an environment promoting healthy eating habits and physical activity
3. Commitments of the private sector
- 4a. Breastfeeding and infant nutrition
- 4b. Selective deficiencies
5. Undernutrition in hospitals, nursing homes and home care
6. Monitoring of food consumption data
7. Scientific research on nutrition and physical activity

## 6. NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROJECTS FUNDED UNDER THE PHP PROGRAM presented by Antoinette Martiat (EAHC)

This presentation gave a brief overview of the Nutrition and Physical Activity co-funded projects, and highlighted the Executive Agency for Health and Consumers' database of projects financed by the Commission on nutrition and health. These include projects addressing child nutrition and obesity, information collection, workplace interventions and promotion of physical activity. There is an open call for proposals with a deadline of 21 May for projects under the 2009 budget.

## 7. SOCIAL INEQUALITIES AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

**The Euro-Prevob** (Prevention of Obesity in Europe – Consortium for the prevention of obesity through effective nutrition and physical activity actions) **project** was presented by Dr Joceline Pomerleau

This is a 3-year project, funded under FP6 and coordinated by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine with 13 participants from 10 countries including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Italy, Latvia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Turkey, UK). The partners specialise in different disciplines such as nutrition, physical activity research, public health, epidemiology, and economics. This will help improve the understanding of the broad determinants of obesity and related inequalities.

Outcomes will include: a contribution to the wider literature on inequalities in obesity in Europe; a practical tool that can be used by those engaged in obesity prevention to assess what policies are in place and whether they are implemented; a means to assess the cost-effectiveness of policy options, and the development of European networks to reduce inequalities in obesity

Platform member EuroHealthNet presented **Innovative approaches and promising practices by health promotion bodies in the EU to counteract obesity and improve health equity.**

This research exercise represents the EuroHealthnet Platform commitment to... *assemble evidence of what works and thus contribute to refine promising practices,( which can) ... be a source of information for Platform members, health promotion professionals and other interested experts on how to counteract obesity and improve health equity in Europe.* The exercise, which examined 72 projects in 20 countries, ranging from the local level to national and European levels. The research addressed projects on nutrition, physical activity and a combination of the two. The team is now analysing the data submitted. The projects are being reviewed through a lens of how they address inequalities, empowerment and social cohesion.

Ceri Thompson of DG SANCO presented the latest planned Commission Updates on Health and inequalities which should be finalised by the end of 2009. Inequalities will also feature in the coming troika Presidency programme.

## 8. INITIATIVE TO NOMINATE THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET AS AN INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY BY UNESCO presentation by Mr Roberto Sabrido Bermudez

Spain, Italy, Greece and Morocco have applied to UNESCO to have the Mediterranean Diet designated as an "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity". The Mediterranean diet is characterized by a high consumption of fruits and vegetables, pulses, fish, olive oil, nuts and dried fruit and a moderated consumption of wine, meats and dairy products. The application rests upon evidence of the health benefits of this diet, and also on the richness of its historical significance.

## 9. CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS:

- It is important for Member States to check the information from their countries because in the absence of feedback to the contrary, the information will be disseminated and made public. SANCO will also

prepare by mid May an information pack which could be used for media work related to the World Hypertension day on 17 May.

- Feedback is requested on the proposed list of indicators to monitor the EU Strategy. By the next HLG meeting in July, this must be finalised and endorsed. Close liaison is needed with the WHO focal points, particularly because the monitoring project is EU co-funded. The monitoring framework will be explored in detail at the next meeting.
- There will be further presentations on national developments on nutrition – Sweden has indicated their readiness to present at the next meeting. The EU Health portal is also a useful tool to share with a broader audiences materials that are produced nationally, currently there are 150 videos on the portal.
- The July meeting will continue the discussion on salt reduction – specifically the issue of iodine in relation to salt reduction campaigns and how to measure the impact of such campaigns. SANCO will also provide feedback from discussions with the medical devices industry about how they could support and assist the measuring of salt consumption (urine tests etc).
- The question of nutrients will be explored further in July by a first exchange of views about initiating an EU campaign on sugar and fat.
- The discussion needs to continue on the impact of the financial crisis on poorer communities and how this might affect the money they have to spend on food. Any data or early studies of the impact could be sent to SANCO and shared with HLG members.
- The High Level Group will also return to the question of the AudioVisual Media Directive for an exchange on how Member States will monitor the new Article on the marketing of high fat, salt and sugar foods to children.