



# International **Obesity** TaskForce

## Press Release

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### **England 'leading the world on obesity prevention', say global health experts**

LONDON August 24. England leads the world in the development of policies to prevent obesity, a group of senior international experts say in a letter addressed jointly to the Minister for Public Health, Anne Milton and Secretary of State for Health, Andrew Lansley.

The letter, from the Scientific Advisory Council of the International Obesity TaskForce (IOTF), praises the global leadership taken by England and especially commends the current 'world-class' surveillance schemes, the current controls on the marketing of unhealthy food to children, the development of nutrient profiling – a world first – along with moves to re-formulate processed foods and develop clear front-of-pack nutrition labelling, to enhance school meals standards, and to back these initiatives with targeted social marketing campaigns combined with monitoring and evaluation.

The signatories, consisting of 27 leading scientists and health practitioners working in all regions of the world, urge the coalition government to protect the gains that have been made in tackling obesity, and to further extend and strengthen these policies.

"If other countries were following England's lead we would have much better progress on obesity prevention," said Professor Boyd Swinburn, Chair of the IOTF and Director of the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention, based in Melbourne, Australia.

"Turning the tide of obesity will be difficult, with many challenges, especially from commercial interests," he added. "It takes a combination of government policies, community programmes, capacity building and individual actions to achieve change. But it is the vision and commitment of political leaders that really makes a difference."

The IOTF urges policy-makers to recognise that obesity prevention is a long-term investment which reduces the burden of disease for individuals and families, reduces health care costs to the tax payer, and increases workforce productivity.

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## **Background**

The International Obesity TaskForce (IOTF) is the leading policy think tank on obesity prevention, and is incorporated within the International Association for the Study of Obesity, a 10,000-member organisation with 55 national and regional associations around the world.

IOTF was established in 1995 to tackle the rising prevalence of obesity, a problem now seen in most countries of the world. Obesity creates significant pressure on health care systems which are straining under the escalating costs of resulting chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancers. Obesity is contributing to an increasingly large proportion of the preventable health burden, overtaking smoking in some high income countries and undernutrition in many low and middle income countries.

At the recent International Congress on Obesity in Sweden (July 2010), the IOTF Scientific Advisory Council reviewed the progress countries were making in instituting effective, sustainable policies for the prevention of obesity. Based on the evidence presented at the conference and the feedback from the IOTF network of experts, two countries were clearly taking the lead in obesity prevention – England and Brazil.

The text of the letter from the IOTF Scientific Advisory Council to Andrew Lansley and Anne Milton is attached to this release. It includes details of the 27 international health experts of the IOTF Scientific Advisory Council.

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