

# Submission to the Australia 20:20 Summit

The Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH)

[www.awash.org.au](http://www.awash.org.au)

## Issue

A national salt reduction strategy is a feasible and cost effective way of reducing the burden of cardiovascular disease in Australia. The government should take leadership and make salt reduction a national health priority alongside childhood obesity.

## Rationale

Each year more than 48,000 deaths from cardiovascular disease occur in Australia, making it the leading cause of death. Blood pressure is a leading determinant of cardiovascular disease in Australia and even small reductions in blood pressure across the population would translate into substantial reductions in the numbers of deaths from heart disease and stroke. Excess salt consumption is widely considered to be one of the most important contributors to raised blood pressure and Australians are currently consuming around 9 grams of salt per day, against a recommended maximum of 6 grams.

## The Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health

The Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) is a growing network of representatives from the medical profession, scientific community, food industries, consumer associations, education and health promotion bodies. All support the health benefits of a population-wide reduction in dietary salt. AWASH is currently hosted by the George Institute for International Health in Sydney ([www.george.org.au](http://www.george.org.au)).

## The Drop the Salt! Campaign

In 2007, AWASH launched a campaign to reduce mean population daily salt intake in Australia to less than 6 grams within five years. The main strategies are working with the food industry to reduce salt in processed foods, raising consumer awareness and clear labelling. The campaign has already secured strong support from key players in the food industry and several have already committed to the AWASH target of reducing salt in processed food products by an average 25% over five years. AWASH is developing a comprehensive program to monitor and evaluate changes and is confident that it will be able to demonstrate progress.

## The need for government leadership

However, as salt is a leading cause of death and disability in Australia, the government should take leadership and commit to making salt reduction a national health priority and reducing population intakes to 6grams by 2012 through implementation of a comprehensive strategy. There is very clear evidence that even a small reduction in salt consumption will translate into lower blood pressure levels and lower vascular risk with direct benefits to the health of the nation. There is also clear evidence that a population wide salt reduction strategy can be effective. In the UK, where government set key targets for salt reduction, average population salt intake is reported to have fallen from 9.5 to 9.0g/day over the last 12 months does. There are few strategies that are feasible, offer such large health gains, at such low cost and in such a short timeframe.

## Further information

AWASH is currently preparing a detailed briefing paper on this issue that will be available shortly. Further information can be obtained from **Jacqui Webster**, AWASH Senior Project Manager on 0299934520 or [jwebster@george.org.au](mailto:jwebster@george.org.au)