

World Hypertension Day 17th May

New research reveals Australia lagging on salt reduction

Media release

Embargoed – not for publication before 00.01, Tuesday 17th May

New research to be published in the Journal of Hypertension shows 32 countries now have national programs to reduce population salt intake. Central to the success of these programs is the establishment of targets for the maximum amount of salt in different foods.

In the UK, US and Canada, governments have set targets for over 80 different food categories. Furthermore, the UK has already been able to demonstrate a reduction in population salt intake saving thousands of lives each year. Only nine targets have been established in Australia so far.

Said Jacqui Webster, lead author of the report in the Journal of Hypertension and Senior Project Manager at The George Institute for Global Health: *“There is a huge body of evidence showing that salt is the main cause of high blood pressure which kills thousands of people each year - mostly through premature strokes, heart attacks and heart failure. The new research shows how countries around the world are responding to this evidence by implementing national salt reduction programs. Australia urgently needs to do the same.”*

Ms Webster continued: *“Some food companies in Australia have been reducing salt levels, but the government urgently needs to take tougher action to ensure faster progress. Just nine targets set by the Food and Health Dialogue to date is weak compared to other countries. That’s why The George Institute announced 85 new salt targets for foods to give industry the direction they’ve been asking for. We’ll be working closely with companies to help them reduce salt in line with these interim targets in support of ongoing Food and Health Dialogue discussions.”*

Globally, **7 million people die and 1.5 billion suffer every year** because of high blood pressure levels. It is the single biggest risk factor for death worldwide causing heart disease, stroke, diabetes and kidney disease. Salty diets increase the risk of developing high blood pressure and reducing population salt intakes is a highly cost effective strategy for reducing blood pressure levels with huge benefits for public health.

World Hypertension Day has been established to highlight the preventable stroke, heart disease and kidney diseases caused by high blood pressure and to communicate to the public information on prevention, detection and treatment. Each year, **May 17th** is designated **World Hypertension Day**.

###ENDS###

For more information please contact:

Senior Project Manager

Jacqui Webster

0420 980 584

jwebster@georgeinstitute.org.au

Notes to editors:

1. This press release has been issued by the AWASH Secretariat, which coordinates the day-to-day activities of AWASH and takes final responsibility for all outputs from AWASH. The Secretariat is informed by an Advisory Group which comprises a larger group of individuals with expertise in a range of different areas pertinent to the activities of AWASH.
2. For the full report see: Webster J , Dunford E, Hawkes C, Neal B. Salt reduction initiatives around the world Journal of Hypertension: June 2011 - Volume 29 - Issue 6 - p 1043–1050
http://journals.lww.com/jhypertension/Fulltext/2011/06000/Salt_reduction_initiatives_around_the_world.3.aspx
3. Interim Australian targets for sodium levels in Australian processed foods are available at www.awash.org.au/documents/Interim_Salt_Targets_for_Australia.pdf
4. AWASH is a growing network of individuals and organisations concerned with salt and its effects on health. The mission of AWASH is to improve the health of Australians by achieving a gradual population-wide reduction in dietary salt consumption that will reduce cardiovascular diseases and other salt-related health problems. Visit www.awash.org.au for more information and for a full list of our advisors and supporters.