

**Media Release**

# **Australia answers urgent WHO call to lower salt in food**

17 April 2007

A new World Health Organization (WHO) report has highlighted the strong scientific evidence for the damage to health caused by eating too much salt, and is calling for countries around the globe to urgently adopt national approaches to reduce the salt content of foods.

In conjunction with this, plans have been developed to roll-out a 5 year salt reduction campaign in Australia. The **Drop the Salt!** Campaign will be launched on 15<sup>th</sup> May in Sydney, and will unite health professionals, the food industry, government, scientists and consumer organisations in a commitment to act to reduce population salt intakes in Australia.

This national effort has been initiated by the Australian Division of the World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH). One of the key contributors to the international conference that resulted in the WHO report, Dr Bruce Neal, is also the Chair of AWASH. “*We’re keen to get things moving in Australia, because salt levels in the Australian diet are high and the adverse health impacts are enormous,*” he said.

The WHO report, *Reducing Salt Intake in Populations*, released this month, emphasizes several key points, including:

- The strong link between dietary salt and chronic diseases, particularly stroke and heart attack, Australia’s leading killers;
- The demonstrated success and cost-effectiveness of efforts to reduce population-wide salt intake;
- The urgent need to implement salt reduction strategies in countries to tackle the increasing mortality attributable to high blood pressure and other salt-related health problems;
- The need to work closely with food manufacturers as the cornerstone of any successful national salt reduction campaign.

Dr Neal, a Senior Director at The George Institute for International Health, has led several global studies addressing the impact of dietary salt on population health. “*The evidence that links salt to blood pressure and blood pressure to cardiovascular disease is very strong. We must take this much more seriously than we have to date,*” he said.

The AWASH campaign will incorporate the key elements for tackling dietary salt reduction, noted in the WHO report, into its main strategies:

1. Reducing the salt added in food production,
2. Improving information on salt levels for consumers, and
3. Raising awareness of the health issues.

Dr Caryl Nowson, from Deakin University, and a member of the AWASH Secretariat, noted that *“The evidence for the harmful effects of salt is very strong, but so is the evidence for the health benefits of national salt reduction strategies.”*

Dr Neal added, *“Reducing salt is so important because salt has harmful effects on almost everyone in the population. Nearly everyone’s blood pressure is raised by salt and over the course of people’s lives this contributes to hypertension in millions of Australians. On the positive side this means that salt reduction could lower the risk for almost everyone too.”*

The AWASH campaign is the first cohesive national salt reduction effort in Australia. It is backed by scientific evidence with clear targets, and a coordinated strategy for raising consumer awareness and engaging positively with the food industry.

AWASH is supported by a wide base of industry, academic and consumer groups, and is linked to a world-wide campaign called WASH (World Action on Salt and Health) that is leading the global effort on improving health through reducing salt intake.

- ENDS -

For more information please contact:

Public Affairs Officer

**Emma Orpilla**

02 9993 4592

0410 411 983

eorpilla@george.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.
1. The **Drop the Salt!** Campaign launch and networking lunch will take place at 11am on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May at the Kerry Packer Education centre, Missenden Road, Camperdown, Sydney. It will be chaired by nutritionist and food writer, Catherine Saxelby. Speakers will include Bruce Neal (Senior Director, The George Institute for International Health), Peter Slator (Chairman, Unilever Australasia), Stephen Harrap (Chairman, High Blood Pressure Research Council) and Clare Hughes (Choice). See attached flyer and registration form for further details.
2. The Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (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.
3. The primary goal of AWASH is to **reduce the average amount of salt consumed by Australians to 6g per day within the next five years**. This goal will be achieved through four main strategies:
    - An average twenty five percent reduction in the salt content of foods
    - An average twenty five percent reduction in salt use by the catering industry
    - Increased population knowledge of the benefits of low salt diets
    - Clear labelling of foods that makes the salt content immediately apparent
  4. AWASH will achieve this goal by promoting the benefits of salt reduction and engaging the participation of all sectors of the Australian community - this will include industry, schools, consumers, scientists, healthcare workers, governments, regulatory bodies and professional organisations. Regular monitoring of progress towards the goal and careful scrutiny of the development of each strategy will be undertaken throughout the campaign.
  5. Australian organizations who have already signed up to the aims and objectives of the AWASH **Drop the Salt!** Campaign include:
    - Cancer Council NSW
    - Diabetes Australia NSW
    - Dietitians Association of Australia
    - Heart Research Institute
    - High Blood Pressure Research Council
    - Meniere's Support Group of New South Wales
    - Menzies Research Institute
    - National Heart Foundation of Australia
    - National Stroke Foundation
    - North Shore Hypertension Service
    - Nutrition Physiology Research Centre
    - Parents Jury
    - Research Australia
    - The George Institute for International Health
  6. WASH - In 2006, around 194 medical experts from 48 countries around the world joined together to launch WASH – World Action on Salt and Health – in a concerted effort to reduce dietary salt intake, in order to lower blood pressure globally. [www.worldactiononsalt.com](http://www.worldactiononsalt.com)