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Comments concerning “the draft Global strategy on diet, physical activity and health”

The Ministry of Health of Italy gives great importance to the integrated prevention of noncommunicable diseases and we welcome the proposed Draft Global Strategy on diet, physical activity and health, to be adopted by the Fifty-seventh World Health Assembly in May 2004.

Considering the utmost importance of this strategy in the framework of the prevention of the heavy and growing burden of noncommunicable diseases worldwide, we think that it should be endorsed by consensus and the final text should be the best possible result of scientific, evidence-based considerations and reflections. The intense debate and discussions which took place at the 113th session of the Executive Board have clearly shown that there is still the need for improvements of the present draft and we welcome the decision taken to allow Member States to further comment on the proposed text.

In this regard, we would like to express our views and formulate some specific proposals which might improve the text as contained in document EB113/44 Add.1

More specifically, our suggestions are:

Paragraph 4: we would prefer the following formulation: “unhealthy diets and physical inactivity are among the major causes of many NCDs” (“major” instead of “leading”: seems more balanced, considering the fact that there are other major causes of NCDs, such as: smoking, environmental factors etc.)

Paragraph 9: a reference should be made to the lack of balance between energy intake and physical activity of children and adolescents.

Paragraph 18: the wording “need to be translated into national recommendations” should be replaced by the following: “should be considered at the national level, as appropriate to national circumstances” (sentence taken from the proposed EB draft Resolution – EB113.R7)

Paragraph 34: it refers exclusively to the joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation on diet, nutrition and prevention of chronic disease, while we would welcome additional references to the important role of scientific peer reviews and to recommendations of national authorities.

Paragraph 36 (1): the title (“promotion of healthier food items”) should be replaced by the following: “promotion of healthy diets”: a terminology which is clearer and more in line with the entire text, while “healthier food items” appears to be rather an unclear and misleading term.

Paragraph 36 (2): (“price policies”): requesting that governments institute policies that will impose special taxes on some food products would imply increasing food prices, with possible impact and consequences on lower income people and especially the poor. We would, therefore, prefer to delete this part (2) of the paragraph.

Paragraph 38: the last 4 lines should be reformulated as follows: “policies should support and promote healthy diets at school, providing a set of different options which allow and facilitate healthy dietary choices”. We believe that such new formulation is more in line with a health promotion approach.

Paragraph 50: we would prefer to reformulate the 11th line as follows: “Initiatives undertaken by the food industry to modify the fat, sugar and salt content of processed food and to review many current marketing practices could play a role in accelerating health gains worldwide”.

On second dot: replace the word “limit” with the word “review”.

Paragraph 57: the wording seems to be over-emphatic. We would prefer the following formulation: “the implementation of this strategy could lead to considerable, significant and sustained improvements in population health”.