REGIONAL COMMITTEE

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PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM THE HARMFUL IMPACT OF FOOD MARKETING

The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific, concerned about the harmful impact of food marketing on children, urged Member States at its sixty-eighth session in October 2017 to accelerate multisectoral and multi-stakeholder action to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing and requested WHO to develop a regional action plan on protecting children from the harmful impact of food marketing, in consultation with Member States and seeking the views of key stakeholders.

Rapid economic growth, urbanization and globalization have changed the food system in the Region, making processed foods more available, affordable and accessible. Evidence has shown that the marketing of breast-milk substitutes and food high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars or salt are widespread across the Region. This has contributed to suboptimal breastfeeding practices, poor dietary behaviours, overweight and obesity in children, and diet-related noncommunicable diseases and other illness later in life. This draft Action Framework provides a set of approaches and recommended actions that Member States can apply based on their national context and needs.

The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific is requested to consider for endorsement the draft Regional Action Framework on Protecting Children from the Harmful Impact of Food Marketing in the Western Pacific.
1. CURRENT SITUATION

Concerned that the harmful effects of food marketing on the diet and health of children, despite the efforts of Member States, continue to be widespread in the Western Pacific Region, the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in October 2017 (WPR/RC68.R3) urged Member States to accelerate multisectoral and multi-stakeholder action to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing and share best practices. The Regional Committee requested WHO: (1) to advocate and provide technical support to Member States to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing; (2) to foster collaboration among Member States to share experiences and best practices on mechanisms for measuring and mitigating the harmful impact of food marketing; and (3) to develop a regional action plan on protecting children from the harmful impact of food marketing, in consultation with Member States and seeking views of key stakeholders.

In response to this request:

(1) WHO has been providing technical support and tools to support Member States in the development, implementation and/or monitoring of policies contained in the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes*, as well as policies for food marketing in school settings. This includes advocacy and assessment of the food marketing environment and monitoring of the implementation of the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes*, using the WHO toolkits.

(2) Experiences and best practices within the Western Pacific Region and from other regions have also been shared during Member State consultations. In addition, Member States have been supported, through the Pacific Ending Childhood Obesity Network, in sharing experiences, conducting situational analyses, and developing priority actions for restrictions of marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children.

(3) A draft *Regional Action Framework on Protecting Children from the Harmful Impact of Food Marketing in the Western Pacific* was developed in consultation with experts, Member States, and key stakeholders. This Framework provides recommendations to Member States for developing or strengthening national policies to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing. It offers guidance on building multisectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration to address the issue, as well as advocacy and communication strategies to promote action and tools to monitor and evaluate progress.
2. ISSUES

Good nutrition is fundamental to ensuring optimal growth and development in children, as well as health and well-being throughout life. However, in the Western Pacific Region, most Member States face the double burden of malnutrition, where undernutrition coexists with overweight and obesity or diet-related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). This double burden threatens health, human development, well-being and economic productivity. Among children under 5 years of age in the Western Pacific Region in 2018, an estimated 7.7 million were stunted, 2.6 million were wasted, and 7.2 million were overweight. An estimated 84 million children aged 5–19 years in the Region were overweight or obese in 2016, the highest number among all WHO regions, with an increase of 43% in just six years (from 2010 to 2016). The rate of exclusive breastfeeding has remained low in the Region in the past 10 years, with only one out of three infants being exclusively breastfed for the first six months.

Rapid economic growth, urbanization and globalization have changed the food system in the Region, making processed foods more affordable and accessible. Evidence showed marketing of breast-milk substitutes and food high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars or salt is widespread across the Region. Advertising and promotion of breast-milk substitutes and their use have led to a decline in the breastfeeding rate that has contributed to the morbidity and mortality of infants and young children. Marketing of food high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars or salt is associated with poor dietary behaviours, overweight and obesity in children, and diet-related NCDs later in life.

3. ACTIONS PROPOSED

The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific is requested to consider for endorsement the draft Regional Action Framework on Protecting Children from the Harmful Impact of Food Marketing in the Western Pacific.