

Appendix 8 – Example letter to policymaker



DATE
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International Obesity TaskForce

Dear XXX

Re: Brazil as a world leader in policy actions to prevent obesity,

The rising prevalence of obesity in most countries is creating enormous pressures on health care systems which are straining under the escalating costs of chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes burden, overtaking smoking in some high income countries and undernutrition in many low and middle income countries. At the recent International Congress on Obesity in Stockholm, Sweden, the International Obesity Taskforce (IOTF) reviewed the progress countries were making in instituting effective, sustainable policies for the prevention of obesity. Based on the evidence presented at the conference and the feedback from our network of experts, two countries were clearly taking the lead in obesity prevention – Brazil and England. IOTF would like to highly commend Brazil on its excellent progress on this very challenging societal problem. In particular, IOTF was impressed with the following initiatives:

1. **Regulating food marketing:** Resolution 24/2010 from ANVISA on the regulation of advertisements of food products with excessive salt, sugar, saturated fats or trans fats is a major advance internationally. In particular, the clear, pre-determined health warnings on any advertisement of these unhealthy products on television, print media and the internet will be a valuable strategy. While this will come under strong attack from the food industry and the commercial media sector, such measures are an essential part of reducing the rising health burden associated with unhealthy diets.

2. **School meals:** The federal law approved by the Congress and signed by the President, requiring that a minimum of 30% of the resources of the National School Meal Program (more than 1 billion US dollars per year) be used to buy fresh foods grown by local family farmers is very important for health and local economies. This builds on a previous resolution required that 0% of foods offered to children were basic, minimally processed foods. The School Meal Program is an excellent exemplar for other countries with similar programs to follow. There was much interest in the program when it was presented at the recent International Congress on Obesity in Stockholm.

3. **Monitoring of obesity trends:** The existence of a solid national system which monitors obesity prevalence and its immediate determinants (diet and physical activity patterns) through periodic national household surveys is another exemplar that even many wealthy countries would wish to have. It is based on high quality, international standards and covers both adults and children.

4. **Obesity management:** The incorporation of actions aiming at the prevention and management of obesity and other chronic diseases in the national Family Health Program is another important strategy in a comprehensive plan.

5. **Breastfeeding:** The successful comprehensive national breastfeeding program has been a remarkable success (and again the envy of many countries) by increasing the median duration of total breast feeding from 3 months in the 1970s to 12 months in 2008. The inclusion of a strong code which regulates the marketing of infant formula is an essential strategy to protect mothers from the unethical marketing practices of some infant formula companies.

Minister, this is an impressive suite of policies and programmes and if other countries were following Brazil's lead, we would have much more positive news to present to obesity conferences on positive evidence of progress in obesity prevention. The progress in Brazil since the International Congress on Obesity was held in Sao Paulo in 2002 has been extremely positive.

IOTF recognises that the journey to turn the tide of obesity will be a long one with many challenges, especially from commercial vested interests, along the way. In any complex and contested endeavour to improve societal outcomes, a combination of government policies, community programmes, capacity building and individual actions will be needed but it is often the vision and commitment of the political leaders that really makes a difference between progress and no progress.

IOTF would like to highly commend you and your government for making a difference for the population of Brazil, especially the children and adolescents to whom society has a special responsibility. In addition, we would like to acknowledge the international leadership that Brazil is providing for other countries. This is critically important for obesity, which is a global epidemic with no easy or short term answers. If IOTF can assist your government in any way to build on this excellent base, we would be happy to do so.

Yours sincerely
Prof. Boyd Swinburn; Prof. Shiriki Kumanyika, Joint Chair IOTF

In addition all the international members of the IOTF Scientific Advisory Council are co-signatories to the letter as listed below:-

Copies of this letter have also been sent to the following:

Dirceu Raposo de Mello – Diretor Presidente da ANVISA
Francisco Batista Junior - Presidente do Conselho Nacional de Saúde
Ana Beatriz Vasconcellos- Diretora da Coordenação Geral da Política de Alimentação e Nutrição (CGPAN)
baneide Peixinho- Coordenadora Geral do Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar (PNAE)