

# Government strategies for diabetes and childhood obesity encouraging

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The University of Otago's Edgar Diabetes and Obesity Research Centre (EDOR) welcomes two highly important health strategies targeting childhood obesity and diabetes that the government has launched in recent days.

"These government plans acknowledge the principle that a two-pronged approach is necessary when dealing with diseases that have reached epidemic proportions, as is the case with [obesity](#) and diabetes," says EDOR Director Professor Jim Mann.

"An effective strategy must target both the individuals who have already developed the disease, or are at high risk of doing so, as well as implement preventative measures in the population at large."

The new diabetes and obesity strategies provide treatment avenues for individuals, including [children](#).

EDOR [childhood obesity](#) researcher Associate Professor Rachael Taylor says the potential treatment options should benefit the large number of children identified as obese via the Before School Check, and fit nicely with the broader-brush Healthy Families initiative.

"A critical factor will be to ensure that the appropriate resources are available for effective implementation".

Other new initiatives that the researchers believe are important include

additional resource and guidance for pregnant women, to ensure optimal health for them and their babies; as well as clear information for health professionals allowing them to more easily identify women with gestational diabetes.

Associate Professor Taylor has concerns that the population strategies for children in this initiative are predominantly based around [physical activity](#).

"Increased physical activity on its own will not reverse the [obesity epidemic](#). However we know that improving the food environment is essential for reducing obesity in children" says Associate Professor Taylor.

"While there are some useful actions in the recently announced package, it could be argued that many of the nutrition strategies lack teeth.

"The government has been working with industry for many years around food marketing to children – but this is only ever at a voluntary level – where is the evidence that this has made a difference?"

She sees it as necessary to implement stricter control measures to prevent the continuing advertising of junk food to children, widely accepted as a pivotal component of improving the food environment.

However, Associate Professor Taylor applauds healthy eating policies being implemented in DHB's, such as not allowing sugary drinks to be sold on hospital premises, but believes such policy could have limited reach for children.

"Such policies will be far more effective in the school system – where children spend a lot of their time."

Provided by University of Otago

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