



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S CHIEF SCIENCE ADVISOR

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Sir Peter Gluckman to lead global attack on Childhood Obesity

Dr Margaret Chan, Director General of the World Health Organisation announced at the World Health Assembly on Monday in Geneva, the establishment of a Commission to end Childhood Obesity. Dr. Chan has named Sir Peter Gluckman, Science Advisor to the Prime Minister of New Zealand and Dr Sania Nishtar, a renowned public health scientist and former Minister of Science and Education of Pakistan, to co-chair the Commission. Among the Commissioners are global experts and distinguished opinion leaders. They will be advised by two working groups: an expert group of scientists to review the science and evidence so as to identify possible solutions; and a working group on implementation, monitoring and accountability. The Commission and its working groups will meet several times over the year and will be supported by WHO staff. A report is expected in early 2015.

Childhood obesity is an escalating concern globally. It is a precursor to the major issues of obesity, heart disease and diabetes in adulthood and itself is associated with other morbidities in childhood including allergic disorders and impaired learning. It is expected that a significant reduction in relative obesity, not just obvious obesity, will have both major direct and indirect benefits to the health of populations.

Sir Peter has been assisting Dr Chan to develop this initiative over the last several months. "I am honoured to accept this important role and thank the Prime Minister for his support in my doing so. I look forward to working with Dr Nishtar and other distinguished Commissioners to recommend a plan of action and accountability", said Sir Peter.

Both Dr Chan and Sir Peter point out that the solutions to obesity and its co-morbidities are complex – there are biological, behavioral and contextual dimensions to consider. *"No single discipline can provide the groundwork for a strategic approach to tackling childhood obesity. Social scientists, public health specialists, clinical scientists and economists will join together to synthesize the best available evidence into a coherent plan. Actors responsible for food production, manufacturing, marketing and retail; maternal health and nutrition; child health, education and health literacy; physical activity; and public policy will also be engaged in the task"*, said Dr. Chan in announcing the Commission.

The project will need to consider the potential role of interventions that extend from before conception through childhood, and consider the child in the family and community context. Developing a pragmatic and effective plan will require consideration of science, societal dimensions and the varying contexts in which children grow up. Tackling obesity in childhood is an important step forward in the global fight against non-communicable disease.

For further information:

See <http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/end-childhood-obesity/action-plan/en/>
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