

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Bryna Warshawsky, Acting Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2013 February 19

BILL C-460: THE SODIUM REDUCTION STRATEGY FOR CANADA ACT

Recommendations

It is recommended:

- 1) *That the Board of Health endorse Bill C-460: The Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada Act; and further*
- 2) *That the Board of Health send a letter of support for Bill C-460 to the Prime Minister of Canada; the Federal Minister of Health; local Members of Parliament; the Chief Public Health Officer at the Public Health Agency of Canada; the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario; the Ontario Public Health Association; the Association of Local Public Health Agencies; the Southwest Local Health Integration Networks; and the Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.*

Key Points

- Government-led efforts to reduce sodium levels in foods may be the most cost-effective way to reduce sodium intake and prevent chronic disease.
- A reduction in sodium consumption by 1,800 mg/day would prevent approximately 10,000 to 16,000 deaths annually in Canada.
- *Bill C-460: The Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada Act* requires manufacturers to lower sodium levels or alert consumers if they have not done so, and ensure consumers have access to information about the sodium content of foods through informative and understandable food labeling.
- *Bill C-460* mandates governments to be accountable to Parliament with progress reports regarding the implementation of the Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada.

Background

Excess sodium in the Canadian diet raises blood pressure and increases the risk of stroke, heart disease, kidney failure and other illnesses causing 10,000 to 16,000 premature deaths annually. The prevalence of hypertension in Ontarians 12 years or older has increased progressively between 2003 and 2010. Three-quarters of the sodium in the Canadian diet is added to foods by food manufacturers and restaurants. As a measure to address the sodium content of processed food in 2010, the federal Minister of Health's 25-member *Sodium Reduction Working Group* published its [*Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada*](#) report. The report called for a reduction in average daily sodium intake from 3,400 mg/day to 2,300 mg/day by 2016 as an interim goal. This goal was endorsed by the Prime Minister, Provincial Premiers and Territorial Leaders; these leaders further supported the need for regulations if the food industry chose not to implement voluntary sodium reductions.

Unfortunately by February 2011, the *Sodium Reduction Working Group* was disbanded and their responsibilities given to the *Food Regulatory Advisory Committee*, assembled by Health Canada. The

Food Regulatory Advisory Committee has met criticism as many of its members are involved in the food industry or have little or no experience in matters related to sodium or health-related outcomes from sodium consumption. In early 2012, 17 health organizations, including Dietitians of Canada and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, urged the Prime Minister to implement the strategy outlined by the original *Sodium Reduction Working Group*.

The Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada Act (Bill C-460)

Bill C-460, The Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada Act ([Appendix A](#)) is currently being debated in the House of Commons. If passed, *Bill C-460* would require all food companies and key government departments to begin or continue to implement the *Sodium Reduction Strategy*. Food manufacturers would have to lower sodium levels to meet Health Canada's sodium-reduction targets for the applicable food categories or alert consumers if they have not done so. In addition, the Bill mandates that consumers have access to clear information to help make healthy food choices through regulatory modifications to nutrition labeling on pre-packaged foods and chain restaurant menus, restricting advertising of high sodium foods to children, and implementing nutrition standards for food procurement in public institutions. *Bill C-460* would make food companies accountable to their customers through enhanced nutrition labeling and governments accountable to Parliament through annual progress reports.

Highlights of *Bill C-460*

- The Minister of Health to establish a Sodium Reduction Advisory Committee.
- Sodium levels in pre-packaged foods limited to the levels indicated in the document *Guidance for the Food Industry on Reducing Sodium in Processed Foods* (Health Canada, 2012).
- Pre-packaged foods that exceed the sodium limits must include the label "this food does not meet Health Canada's sodium-reduction targets. Excess sodium is a leading cause of hypertension, heart attack and strokes."
- Calculate sodium percent daily value on the Nutrition Facts Tables based on the 1500 mg adult Adequate Intake, instead of the current practice as a percent of the Tolerable Upper Intake, which is considered the maximum safe amount. This method is consistent with the calculation for other nutrients.
- Define serving size on food labels in a non-misleading way.
- Devise a system for indicating high sodium levels in standardized menu items sold in large chain restaurants.
- Restrict the marketing and promotion of high sodium foods to children.
- Public funds shall not be spent on high sodium foods.
- Monitor food companies to ensure their progress toward the sodium reduction goals.

Conclusion

The average Canadian consumes more than double the recommended amount of sodium; approximately 77% of this dietary sodium comes from processed food, 11% is added during cooking or at the table, and the remaining 12% occurs naturally in foods. There is significant evidence connecting high sodium intake with excessive use of anti-hypertensive drugs, chronic disease and premature death. It is imperative that the Federal Government take the necessary action to pass *Bill C-460: The Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada Act* without further delay in order to demonstrate their commitment to improve the health of Canadians through the prevention of chronic disease. In addition to the Health Unit's advocacy efforts, a local sodium reduction communication strategy is being developed by the Health Unit's Registered Dietitians. This initiative was introduced to the Board of Health in October 2012 (see [Report No. 125-12](#)). Updates regarding the strategy will be shared with the Board later this year.

This report was prepared by Ms. Chris Callaghan, Ms. Ginette Blake, Ms. Kim Leacy and Dr. Heather Thomas, Public Health Dietitians; Ms. Linda Stobo, Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention and Tobacco Control Team; and Ms. Christine Preece, Manager, Young Adult Team.



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<p>This report addresses the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Chronic Diseases and Injuries Program Standards 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11 and 12.</p>
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