



## The Nutritional Health Alliance launches Mexican mass media campaign “Don’t Let This Be Their Future” to sound the alarm on obesity

- *This campaign (“Que este no sea su futuro”) targets Mexico’s presidential candidates, urging them to make proposals and commitments to develop comprehensive, effective policy measures to prevent future generations from suffering from diseases related to poor diet and nutrition.*
- *Thousands of premature deaths could be prevented by measures promoting better food and nutrition for the general population.*

**Mexico City, March 7, 2018.-** More than 25 years ago, in 1992, one of Mexico’s leading nutrition scientists warned the Mexican government that changes in the population’s diet would have catastrophic health consequences: *“People’s changing diet will have serious repercussions to their health in the near future. Unless immediate action is taken, the young – with such poor diets, influenced by what they see on television – will fall victim to chronic diseases, by which time it will be too late for us to make a difference.”* To date, the Mexican state has neglected its duty **to guarantee the health of its citizens**. The number of deaths caused by diabetes alone in Mexico has risen by 400% from 25,000 in 1990 to 106,000 in 2016.

It was not until 18 years later, in 2010, that President Felipe Calderón unveiled the first anti-obesity strategy the National Agreement on Nutritional Health (*Acuerdo Nacional para la Salud Alimentaria*), a well-intentioned but toothless and underfunded initiative. In 2013, President Peña Nieto presented the National Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Overweight, Obesity and Diabetes (*Estrategia Nacional para la Prevención y el Control del Sobrepeso, Obesidad y Diabetes*), but this strategy also failed because it **permitted the design of essential anti-obesity regulations to be co-opted by the food and beverage industry**. In 2016, Mexico’s Ministry of Health declared obesity and diabetes an epidemiological emergency, a landmark measure usually reserved for communicable diseases, and one that highlighted the urgent need to implement and strengthen effective obesity prevention measures. Nevertheless, the government failed to take further action, nor did it correct the failures of its existing policies, which contradict the recommendations issued by national and international organizations and experts. The evidence shows that one out of every two Mexican children born after 2010 is at risk of developing diabetes over their lifetime; this is the future awaiting them if the government continues to disregard these recommendations.

Scientific evidence clearly reveals that one’s health is closely linked to the quantity and quality of food that one consumes. Indeed, promoting a healthier diet could prevent thousands of premature deaths. One key problem to be addressed is the rapid increase in the consumption of ultra-processed foods, popularly known in Mexico as *“comida chatarra”* (junk food), which do not provide proper nutrition. These products are marketed to children using misleading messages and misinformation. It is the government’s obligation to regulate the marketing of these products and to ensure clear front-of-pack nutritional labeling, in order to guarantee the rights to information, food, water, and health, as well as the best interests of the child.

Children who have a poor diet from a young age, face an increased risk of developing a variety of diseases, particularly cardiovascular problems, diabetes (and its associated complications, such as kidney damage), some forms of cancer and tooth decay. Therefore, it is particularly troubling that a recent study revealed

that the population segment in Mexico that consumes the most ultra-processed foods are pre-school age children.

Within this context, the Nutritional Health Alliance has launched the campaign “*Que este no sea su futuro*” (Don’t Let This Be Their Future ) aimed to pressure Mexico’s presidential candidates to develop proposals and commitments for effective, comprehensive policy to prevent future generations from suffering from diseases related to poor nutrition. The campaign specifically points to the need for proper front-of-pack nutritional labeling and effective regulation of junk-food marketing to children.

At the launch of the campaign, Alejandro Calvillo – director of *El Poder del Consumidor*, a consumer rights’ organization and member of the Nutritional Health Alliance, declared: “During the current administration, we have been faced with a simulation of regulatory measures compromised from the outset by interference from the big food and beverage industry. If this policy had been designed by Mexican research institutions, which were established specifically to provide scientific evidence for our public health policies, today we would have useful front-of-pack nutritional labeling that is understandable for the entire population, including children, as well as a strict regulation of junk food marketing aimed at children. This would prevent the constant and highly visible bombardment of messages that influence purchasing decisions and the consumption of unhealthy food and drinks. Such regulations are improving dietary habits in other countries.”

Fiorella Espinosa, a nutritional health specialist from the same organization, added: “The government had the necessary scientific evidence available to be able to design, implement and improve regulatory practices that form part of the National Strategy to Prevent and Control Overweight, Obesity and Diabetes; it even received direct recommendations from the Pan American Health Organization to optimize front-of-pack nutritional labeling. But this has all been steadfastly ignored by the current administration, which now only has a few months left in office.”

The Nutritional Health Alliance’s campaign is based on numerous scientific articles showing the connection between the consumption of junk food and the risk of becoming overweight, obese and developing cardiovascular diseases, diabetes (including its associated kidney damage), some forms of cancer, and tooth decay. Speaking on this issue, Ana Larrañaga, a nutrition expert from the organization called *Salud Crítica*, mentioned: “Junk food products generally have very poor nutritional value and contain large quantities of added sugars, sodium, saturated or trans-fats, not to mention a high calorie content. These products are marketed as being affordable and easy or fast to prepare. Yet despite all the evidence linking them to diseases such as obesity, type-2 diabetes and cancer, consumers are never warned about these risks, and these products continue to be aggressively marketed to children.”

The campaign will be featured on radio, billboards, and buses in Mexico City, as well as on social media and the campaign website: <http://protejamossusalud.org/>

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