

MEDIA RELEASE - 8/04/2024

Healthy Meals, Healthy Futures: The Paediatric Society and Diabetes Experts Call for Support of School Lunch Programme

The Paediatric Society of New Zealand | Te Kāhui Mātai Arotamariki o Aotearoa (PSNZ), along with its Clinical Network for Children and Young People with Diabetes, is calling on the government to reconsider the proposed cuts or narrowing of the vital Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches Programme. This initiative has proven to be a lifeline for many tamariki across Aotearoa, ensuring they have access to nutritious meals essential for their growth, development, and overall wellbeing.

Dietitian Shelley Rose highlights the critical role the programme plays in the lives of many children and young people, including those living with diabetes. "Regular, healthy meals are the cornerstone of diabetes management. They help keep blood glucose levels steady and provide the nutrients needed for our tamariki to keep active and grow," says Rose. "We also know that children and young people are better equipped to learn at school if they have access to regular meals, and it limits the need for frequent snacking, which can lead to difficulty managing glucose levels."

The Ka Ora, Ka Ako programme not only provides these essential meals but also creates a great opportunity for children and their families living with diabetes to learn about foods that nourish young bodies and are good for the whole family. Rose adds, "For those living with type 1 diabetes and needing to take regular insulin across the day, the programme provides a summary of the nutrition information that is necessary to match their meal-time insulin dose to the food they are eating."

Key points raised by PSNZ and its Diabetes network members include:

- **Universal Need for Quality Nutrition:** All children and young people deserve access to high-quality, sufficient food to support their health and development.
- **Essential for Children with Diabetes:** The programme supports regular, nutritious meals, which are crucial for managing diabetes and promoting healthy growth and development.
- **Impact on Learning:** Adequate nutrition is linked to improved learning outcomes, as students can better concentrate and engage in educational activities.
- **Educational Value:** The programme serves as a practical tool for teaching children and their families about healthy eating and reducing the reliance on ultra-processed

- **Economic and Community Benefits:** Research from the University of Auckland has highlighted the programme's positive economic impact, with funds circulating within local communities, supporting jobs, and reducing overall government expenditure.

PSNZ additionally opposes any moves to narrow the programme to target only specific groups, such as children from low-income homes or those with disabilities. PSNZ believes that universal access to nutritious meals at school is essential, ensuring that every child, irrespective of their background and abilities, receives the same opportunities for health, growth, and educational success. Limiting the programme to specific groups could exacerbate existing disparities and stigma, making it harder for all children to feel included and supported.

Owen Sinclair, President of PSNZ, stresses the broader societal implications of discontinuing the programme. "Our members see the effects of food insecurity daily. Cutting this programme would not only harm our children's health but also overlook the economic and community benefits it brings. We've seen first-hand the positive impact on children's health, their ability to learn, and the support it provides to struggling families," Sinclair says.

PSNZ urges the government to carefully review all evidence supporting the programme's continuation and expansion, considering the long-term benefits for children in Aotearoa. "It's time we ensure that no child in a country as bountiful as ours goes hungry," Sinclair concludes.

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Contact:

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