

Item #13

Briefing for meeting on sugar taxes and subsidies for healthy foods

Briefing prepared by the Ministry of Health for the Minister of Health regarding a meeting about sugar taxes and subsidies on healthy foods, sent 17 August 2016

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## Meeting with ██████████ regarding sugar tax and subsidy on healthy foods to address obesity

To: Hon Dr Jonathan Coleman, Minister of Health

### Purpose

This briefing provides you with information and talking points for a meeting with Mr ██████████ on 25 August 2016, from 5:00 to 5:15 pm in Beehive 6.4. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss Mr ██████████'s report ██████████

### Background

1. ██████████ is a year ██████ secondary school student at ██████████. (His CV is attached.) You met him at Fieldays on 20 June 2016, when he gave you his report based on his research on managing obesity in New Zealand. The report is attached and includes:
  - discussion of the likely impact of a sugar tax, concluding that on its own it is unlikely to be effective
  - discussion of the likely benefits of a subsidy on healthy food, funded by revenue from a sugar tax
  - a recommendation that the Health Star Rating system be made compulsory
  - discussion of the importance of education and awareness.
2. Mr ██████████ subsequently wrote to you, offering to meet to discuss his report.

### Talking points

3. Mr ██████████'s report provided interesting insight into a young person's perspective. Does he feel that this issue is important to many young people? Why?
4. Many schools have explored sugar tax through social studies, economics and health lessons. Have sugar tax and food subsidies been discussed at Mr ██████████'s school? What has he learned from those discussions?
5. The UK's decision to implement a sugar tax has generated a lot of interest. Does Mr ██████████ think New Zealand could learn from the UK experience?
6. As suggested by Mr ██████████, affordability may be a factor in decisions about what foods to buy. What are his thoughts on targeting income support to those who need it? Does Mr ██████████ have any thoughts on what other factors might influence purchasing decisions, especially for young people?
7. Mr ██████████'s report highlights the importance of information and education to support healthy eating decisions. Does Mr ██████████ have any ideas about the kinds of initiatives that could be most effective, especially for young people?

Contacts:	Bronwyn Croxson, Chief Economist, Client Insights & Analytics	██████████
	██████████, Senior Policy Analyst Economics, Client Insights & Analytics	██████████ ██████████

8. The Ministry of Health is working with the food industry on voluntary measures. Does Mr [REDACTED] have any ideas about how Government and industry can work together?

### Further information

9. Obesity has many and complex causes which are different for different people. What is clear from the evidence is that there are no simple 'silver bullet' solutions that will be effective in reversing this trend. The Government is trying a range of sustained interventions across sectors. This is recognised as the best strategy for addressing obesity.
10. Encouraging the food industry to make changes as well as providing the general public with information to enable them to make healthier decisions are two preferred approaches to reducing obesity.
11. The Ministry of Health has provided funding to the Heart Foundation to enable it to work with industry on reducing salt, sugar and fat content in core foods.
12. The Health Star Rating (HSR) aims to help people make healthier food purchases. It is a voluntary measure which is proving successful in terms of industry participation with approximately 1500 processed food items now displaying the HSR and this is expected to increase.
13. The Ministry of Health is also funding the Health Promotion Agency to deliver a national awareness campaign about the HSR to ensure that people understand how it works.
14. This year the Advertising Standards Authority conducted a major review of advertising practices, with a focus on advertising to children and advertising of food.
15. Although early reports of Mexico's sugar tax experience suggested some success had been achieved, more recent evidence suggests that any effects in the first 12 months may have already reversed.
16. The UK announced in April 2016 that it would implement a levy on manufacturers of sugar-sweetened beverages to take effect in 2018. The levy was to have two levels based on the sugar content of the beverage. It is unclear whether the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union and the subsequent changes in the UK government will result in a change of policy.

END.