



Eleventh Pacific Health Ministers Meeting

April 15-17, 2015



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Nutrition and health in Fiji reflects on the Healthy Island vision

20 years ago, the first Pacific Health Ministers Meeting convened at Yanuca Island and the meeting gave birth to the Yanuca Declaration which encompasses several outcome statements.

In one of the outcomes, a vision statement was coined reflecting the pursuit of the Pacific Island Health forum. It stated, *“Children are nurtured in body, mind and spirit and people work and age with dignity”*.

The vision was tied with nutrition in terms of nurturing the body for the whole generation from conception to old age.

The Fiji Ministry of Health & Medical Services, Government and National Food and Nutrition Centre has since worked towards establishing the importance of nutritional wellbeing.

Research assisted in establishing strategies for betterment. The 1993 and 2004 National Nutritional Survey showed that problems of infant malnutrition, underweight children, anaemia and overweight in adults were leading to heart diseases and that diabetes appear to be worsening. Overweightness and obesity rose from 33% in 1993 to 56 % in 2004 . Anaemia rates increased from 27% in 1993 to 32% in 2004 . Some smaller scale studies in 2008 and 2010 indicated that there were improvements in anaemia rates for children under 5 years and women of child bearing age respectively.

The nutritional wellbeing of a population is an indicator of national development and reflects the combined performance of key Ministries within the social and economic sectors.

Research in Fiji and other Pacific Islands clearly shows that a major cause of all prevalent NCDs and nutrient deficiency diseases has been the change to poorer quality diet and lifestyle as a result of development and modernization.

In fact, available information indicates a downward trend in the production of traditional food crops for local consumption.

The Hon. Minister for Health & Medical Services Mr. Jone Usamate said “The Fiji Government and the Health Ministry continue to work towards addressing the improvement of nutrition in development so that children are nurtured and people are

able to age with dignity. Hence an inter- sectoral approach was needed to improve the food and nutrition situation in the country and this led to the endorsement of the Fiji Plan of Action for Nutrition 2010-2014”.

The National Food and Nutritional Centre (NFNC) was tasked with the role of coordinating the multi-sectoral efforts needed to address the growing food, nutrition and health problems. This included working with multi-sectoral stakeholders including the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Industries and Trade; and civil society organizations such as the Consumer Council of Fiji and the Fiji Council of Churches.

There were also initiatives undertaken with the Food Industries; this included the Iron Fortification Program and the reformulation efforts to reduce the levels of salt, sugar and fat in processed foods and non-alcoholic beverages. Other initiatives by the Government through the Health Ministry was the implementation of National Salt Iodization, Banning the sale of mutton flaps, income generating food security programs, Food Safety Act, and the National Iron and Micronutrient Supplementation.

The Ministry of Health with the National Food and Nutrition Center also incorporated nutrition into the health promoting school concept, drafted and submitted regulations to control marketing of foods to infants and young children as well as the advertising of unhealthy foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children.

NFNC also worked with the divisional and sub divisional Dietitians to establish and maintain food gardens in health care facilities.

“While the Health Ministry has incorporated progressive changes to address the nutritional burden in Fiji, it also reiterates that NCD is a preventable burden. It burdens the economy with excessive medical cost and significant loss of human development potential and work productivity”, said Mr Usamate.

“Our focus now will be placed on creating more awareness and advocating for behavioral changes amongst people in their nutritional choices”, added Mr Usamate.

**This is a buildup article towards the upcoming 11th Pacific Health Ministers Meeting. This meeting will convene at the Shangri-La’s Fijian Resort, Yanuca Island from the 15th-17th April 2015 with 22 Pacific Island Countries expected to attend. This upcoming meeting will also celebrate the 20 year journey since its first Pacific Health Ministers Meeting that convened at Yanuca, Fiji in 1995.*

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