

Food and Nutrition report highlights challenges for LBD

Director of the Counties Manukau Let's Beat Diabetes (LBD) programme Chad Paraone, says the release of the 2006 Food and Nutrition Monitoring Report yesterday highlights just how challenging it will be to get on top of the obesity and diabetes epidemics plaguing Counties Manukau.

The report, issued by Minister of Health Pete Hodgson, includes the latest information on food supply and purchasing patterns, food and nutrient intake, nutritional status and factors influencing dietary intake. One of the key findings was that the average household spends \$6.50 on confectionary each week, but only \$5.90 on fresh fruit.

"For the past eighteen months the partner organisations involved in LBD have been driving a number of initiatives to improve the nutrition and food choices of the people of Counties Manukau," says Paraone.

"Making better food choices and being physically active, are two key things we can do to decrease the risk of obesity – and therefore Type 2 diabetes, but as this report indicates, it is very hard for people to change long-ingrained habits," he says.

LBD is a five year district-wide plan aimed at preventing Type 2 diabetes, slowing the disease progression, and improving the quality of life for people with diabetes in Counties Manukau. It is owned and driven by a broad range of Counties Manukau organisations and partnerships.

"We don't expect to see major change happening in the first year of the LBD programme – we acknowledge that it may take fifteen to twenty years to see significant change across generations – but we are sowing the seeds and putting plans in place to create a healthier future for the communities of Counties Manukau".

Some highlights of LBD initiatives to improve nutrition over the past 6-12 months:

- § **Healthy Tuckshops:** Health and food industry representatives have been working closely with Tangaroa College to develop a tuckshop model which not only provides a supportive health environment but also makes it easier and cheaper for students to choose healthier options. The initiative is to be rolled out to a further nine colleges over the next 8 months.
- § **Sprite Zero Initiative:** LBD worked with the Food Industry Group, Coca Cola and McDonald's to implement a low sugar soft drink trial - replacing Sprite with Sprite Zero for a 26 week period in all 21 McDonalds outlets in Counties Manukau. The results were very promising with a 17% reduction in overall sugar consumption during the trial period, without negative consumer feedback or impact on business viability. The trial is ongoing and Counties Manukau District Health Board, McDonald's and Coca Cola are now exploring other intervention opportunities.
- § **Lotu Moui:** A healthy lifestyles-based programme in partnership with 50 Pacific churches that includes nutrition, education training and physical activity sessions. The nutrition education sessions were attended by more than 250 Pacific community leaders and members. This initiative is ongoing.
- § **Community Action Fund:** A fund that gives grants to community organisations and groups so they can develop and implement grassroots initiatives to encourage healthy eating and physical activity.

- § Nutrition Education for social services groups: LBD provided nutrition education to a social service provider who interacts daily with the most vulnerable families, so they are able to pass on this information. The District Health Board and the food industry are also working to improve the content/mix of food available in food parcels for vulnerable families. Recipes have been developed to show how nutritious meals can be made with ingredients provided.
- § PHO Community Nutrition Pilot: Training and support was given to community health workers and other staff at selected primary health organisations so they can offer nutrition advice and support for their clients.
- § Resources for Early Childhood centres: Nutrition resources and a teacher training package was developed and implemented for Pacific Early Childhood centres in Counties Manukau. Resources include recipes, interactive games to ensure children know and remember what a healthy meals looks like in a fun and interactive way as well as cooking methods to reduce fat content etc.

In the New Year, LBD will kick off a social marketing campaign to support the more than 60 initiatives currently underway across the LBD programme. "Any agencies or organisations interested in being part of the LBD programme should get in touch with us," says Paraone, "This is a wide-reaching programme that is being driven by and for the people of Counties Manukau and there are many ways employers, networking groups, community organisations and other associations can become part of something big like this".

For more information please contact Lauren Young and Associates on 09) 378 8433.