

2017

# Benchmarking Food Environments

Progress by the New Zealand Government on Implementing Recommended Food Environment Policies and Prioritised Recommendations



## Executive Summary

Vandevijvere, S., Mackay, S., and Swinburn, B.

BENCHMARKING FOOD ENVIRONMENTS 2017: Progress by the New Zealand Government on implementing recommended food environment policies and priority recommendations, Auckland: The University of Auckland. 2017



Full report is available at [www.informas.org](http://www.informas.org)

# Summary

The second Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI) was conducted in April-May 2017 by a New Zealand Expert Panel of 71 independent and government public health experts. It used an evidence-based approach to benchmark policies and actions of the Government against international best practice for creating healthier food environments. Progress since 2014 was assessed. Some policies were at the level of international best practice, but many large ‘implementation gaps’ were identified, including for healthy food in schools, fiscal and food retail policies and marketing restrictions for unhealthy foods. The Expert Panel recommended 53 actions, prioritising 9 for immediate action. The Government is strongly urged to act on these recommendations to improve the diets of New Zealanders, especially for children, and to reduce the burgeoning health care costs of obesity and unhealthy diets.

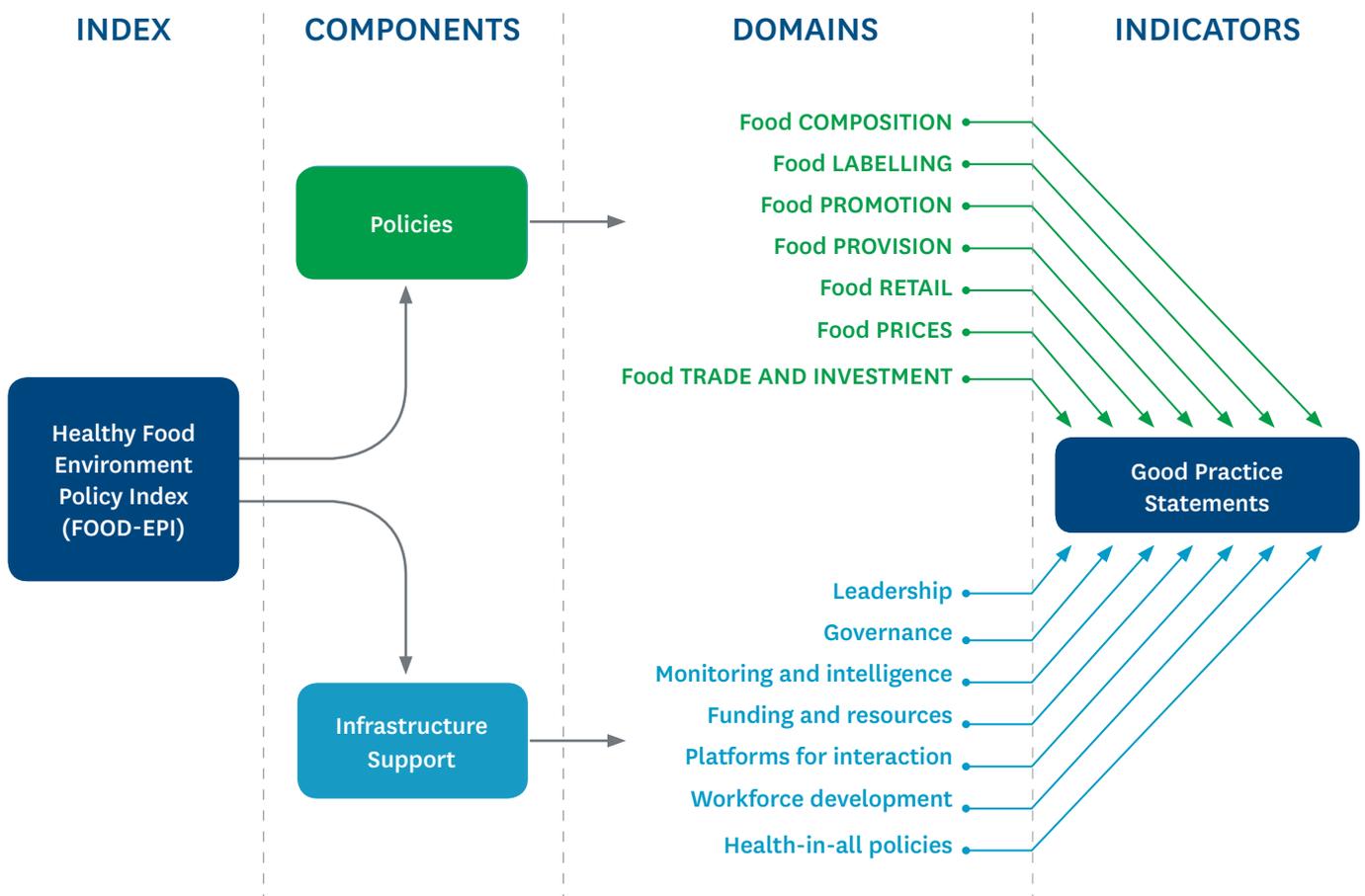
## New Zealand’s implementation of policies to create healthy food environments

Unhealthy food environments drive unhealthy diets. Dietary risk factors and excess energy intake account for 11.4% of health loss in New Zealand. Adults and children have the third highest rate of obesity within OECD countries. Direct health care costs attributable to overweight and obesity were \$686 million or 4.5% of New Zealand’s total health care expenditure in 2006.

Governments have a critical role to play in creating healthier food environments. This study is an initiative of INFORMAS (the International Network for Food and Obesity/non-communicable diseases (NCDs) Research, Monitoring and Action Support) which aims to monitor and benchmark food environments and policies globally to increase the accountability of governments and the food industry for their actions to reduce obesity and NCDs.

The Food-EPI 2017 was conducted with an **Expert Panel** of 71 independent and government public health experts who **rated the extent of implementation** of policies on food environments and infrastructure support by the New Zealand Government **against international best practice**. Their ratings for each of the 47 good practice indicators were informed by **documented evidence, validated by government officials and international best practice benchmarks**. The level of implementation was categorised as ‘high’, ‘medium’, ‘low’ or ‘very little, if any’. The full report and evidence summary are available on [www.informas.org](http://www.informas.org)

## Healthy food environment policy index (FOOD-EPI)



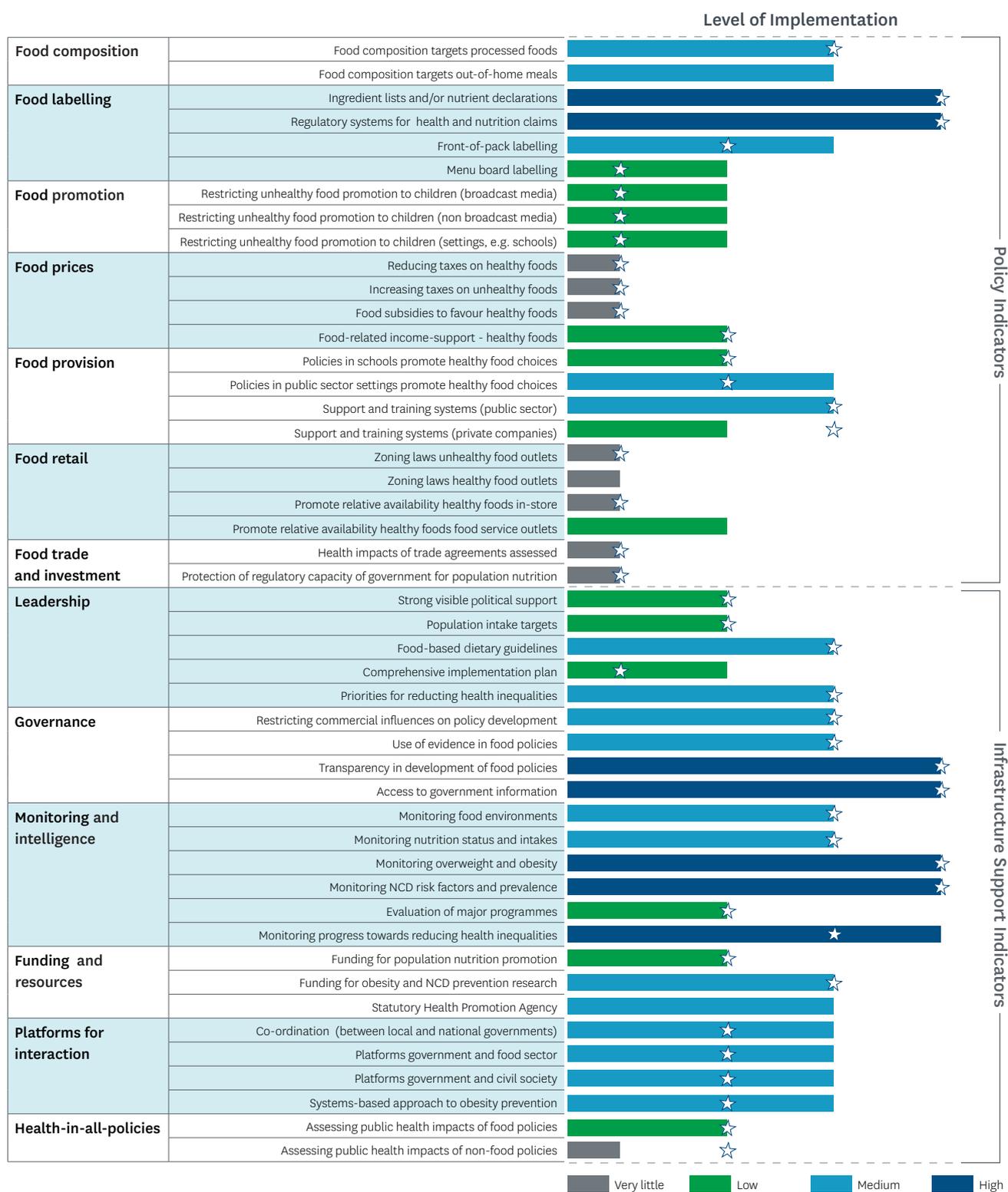
The New Zealand Government is performing well, at the level of international best practice, in preventing unhealthy foods carrying health claims, providing nutrition information panels on packaged foods, transparency in policy development processes, providing access to information for the public and monitoring prevalence of NCDs and their risk factors and inequalities.

Experts recognized progress since 2014 for implementation of the Health Star Ratings, initiating systems-based approaches with communities, developing and implementing the Healthy Food and Drink Policy in the public sector and improving platforms for interaction between Government and other sectors and across Government.

However, there are major 'implementation gaps' with about 70% of the policy indicators and one third of the infrastructure support indicators rated as 'low' or 'very little, if any' implementation.

Gaps were identified for healthy food policies in schools, fiscal policies to support healthy food choices, restrictions on unhealthy food marketing to children, supporting communities to limit the density of unhealthy food outlets (for example, around schools), supporting the food retail and service industry to reduce unhealthy food practices and ensuring that trade and investment agreements do not negatively affect population nutrition and health.

## Level of implementation of food environment policies and infrastructure support by the New Zealand Government in 2017 compared to international best practice (☆ 2014 ratings)



# Top priorities for improving the healthiness of food environments

The Expert Panel recommended 53 concrete actions to improve the healthiness of New Zealand food environments with nine recommendations prioritized for immediate action (for the full list of recommended actions visit [www.informas.org](http://www.informas.org)). All recommendations are aligned with the World Health Organization's Global NCD Action Plan, which was endorsed by the New Zealand Government in May 2013 and again in 2017. The priority actions for improving the healthiness of New Zealand's food environments are:



**1. Strengthen the Childhood Obesity Plan**, including policy objectives and targets to reduce obesity prevalence and inequalities, and more and stronger policies to create healthy children's food environments, and increasing funding for the implementation and evaluation of the plan.



**2. Set targets for**

- a. reducing childhood overweight and obesity by 8 percentage-points (from one-third to one-quarter) by 2025 with decreasing inequalities
- b. reducing mean population intakes of salt, sugar & saturated fat based on World Health Organization recommendations
- c. voluntary reformulation of composition (salt, sugar & saturated fat) in key food groups



**3. Increase funding** for population nutrition promotion to at least 10% of obesity/overweight health care costs.



**4. Regulate unhealthy food marketing**, as defined by the WHO nutrient profiling model, to children up to 18 years

- a. in broadcast media, including during children's peak viewing times (e.g. up to 9pm)
- b. in non-broadcast media, including food packaging, sport sponsorship and social media
- c. in children's settings, including 'school food zones'.



**5. Ensure healthy foods in schools and early childhood education services** using the updated Ministry of Health Food and Beverage Classification System



**6. Introduce a substantial (e.g. 20%) tax on sugar-sweetened beverages** and explore using the revenue for programs to improve public health and wellbeing.



**7. Strengthen the Health Star Rating System** by urgently addressing anomalies in the design algorithm (especially for sugar), increasing funding for promotion and making it mandatory if there is not widespread uptake by 2019.



**8. Implement the new Eating and Activity guidelines** by increasing funding for their promotion and translating them for New Zealand's social, environmental and cultural contexts.



**9. Conduct a new national nutrition survey for children** within 3 years and institute a plan for future regular adult and children nutrition surveys.

