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Legislating to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity

Governments and experts are calling for action to combat the medical, economic and social costs of rising rates of preventable conditions like obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers, states an article in CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal).

To date, governments in Canada have taken little legislative action to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity. Legal uncertainties, ideological opposition, and questions of effectiveness have likely stalled the adoption of legislation aimed at promoting a healthier environment.

The personal and social harms associated with the growing number of chronic disease are, however, a matter of urgent public concern.

“Unhealthy eating habits and a sedentary lifestyle are resulting in an epidemic,” write Nola M. Ries, Faculty of Law, University of Victoria, and Dr. Barbara von Tigerstrom, Faculty of Law and School of Public Health, University of Saskatchewan. “Chronic disease is now a major public health challenge. Governments and experts around the world are calling for concerted action, including

legislative measures, to promote healthier nutrition and physical activity.”

Some measures government could adopt are to tax high-calorie and low-nutrition food and beverages and offer physical activity tax credits. Advertising restrictions could also be adopted as well as imposing mandatory nutrition and physical activity requirements in schools.

“In an area so complex and controversial, not everyone will agree on the best way forward,” write the authors. “But the use of legal measures to promote healthier nutrition and physical activity, especially among children, deserves more attention and action from Canadian legislators.”

Nola M. Ries, Barbara von Tigerstrom. Roadblocks to laws for healthy eating and activity. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 2010; DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.091403