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Position of Hong Kong Dietitian Association on Nutrition Labelling in Hong Kong

Hong Kong Dietitians Association (HKDA) represents about 130 dietetic professionals in Hong Kong serving the public through the promotion of optimal nutrition health and well-being. HKDA fully supports the Hong Kong Government's proposal in introducing the nutrition labelling scheme for the following reasons:

Firstly, there is strong scientific evidence on the relationship between diet and health and the increasing chronic diseases. It is known that healthy eating improves health and helps to prevent many chronic diseases. Nutrition labelling is an important vehicle for providing nutrition information to consumers so as to enhance public health. Promotion of healthy eating has been the national agenda of many countries, so as to improve public health and to reduce health care costs spent on diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, osteoporosis and certain cancers. For example, in U.S.A., it is projected that health benefits associated with reduction in risk of cancer and heart disease would range from US\$ 4440 to 26000 million.

It has been proven that increased nutrition knowledge in the relationship of specific nutrients to chronic disease or health promoting effects, is associated with improved food choice and hence healthier dietary habits. Many studies have shown that nutrition labelling can be used to provide accurate nutrition information so as to facilitate informed food choices and hence beneficial dietary behaviours. This is one of the key factors which led many countries to adopt legislation on nutrition labelling. For countries which had launched their nutrition labelling scheme had shown that nutrition labelling can have a positive impact on citizen's dietary behaviours.

Secondly, there are increasing consumers with diet-related health conditions such as diabetes, high blood cholesterol, kidney disease, osteoporosis, obesity, they have to follow therapeutic diets or designed meal plans. Nutrition labelling on packaged foods is essential for daily meal planning for these consumers, allowing them to make appropriate food choices, and by doing so the hazard on their medical conditions due to uncontrolled nutrient intake is minimized. By means of nutrition labelling and a better managed diet, less complications will occur resulting in less burden on health care costs. In addition, nutrition labelling is essential in widening food choices available to these consumers. Foods once forbidden because of unknown nutrient contents can be flexibly exchanged and integrated into meal plan. A wider food choice will

have a positive effect on the quality of life of these consumers. On the contrary, with current nutrition labelling situation, nutrition claims are not clearly defined and nutrient information inadequate, putting this group of consumers' health at risk. For example, a diabetic patient eating a carbohydrate loaded food, only labelled as "sugar free" but without a nutrition label, his blood sugar level may be seriously affected due to such insufficient nutrition information.

Currently Hong Kong legislation on the regulation of food labels and health claims are very much limited. HKDA supports that statutory legislation aids the protection of the public from false nutrition claims on food labels, and clear guidelines should be given to all manufacturers about what labels should be shown.

HKDA supports the following Government proposal on nutrition labelling scheme:

- Be completed and launched within the proposed period of a five years time (Phase I & II).
- Be mandatory for all pre-packaged foods except those exempted from the requirements.
- Maintain the proposed calorie content and 9 nutrients on nutrition label, while additional nutrition information should be provided if nutrition claims .
- Make reference to the guidelines of Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) on food labelling, and establish a local Nutrient Reference Values (NRVs) for nutrition labeling purposes.

In addition, HKDA would like to propose the following amendments:

- Provide a standardized format on nutrition label in bilingual terms, and standardized nutrients terminology.
- Establish a common serving size for different food categories for food manufacturers to follow, and nutrition claims should be expressed in terms of per serving size instead of per 100 g

In conclusion, nutrition labelling will facilitate consumers to make healthier food choices and enhance public health, and to enable consumers with specific dietary needs to improve meal planning and hence their disease management. The Hong Kong Dietitians Association fully supports the Hong Kong government to introduce the nutrition labelling scheme, and urges the government to continue to promote consumer understanding and use of nutrition labels to improve healthy eating and overall health of Hong Kong people.