



PRESS RELEASE

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Welfare Cuts will Result in Unhealthy Diets and Long-Term Health Problems

Study shows it is up to 10 times cheaper to eat a poor diet

Cuts in social welfare and child benefit, as recommended in the McCarthy report, will result in unhealthy diets and long-term health problems. That's according to Healthy Food for All (HFfA), which today (20.10.09) held a media and political briefing in Buswell's Hotel, Dublin 2. The briefing focused on findings from a scientific study by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) in relation to the affordability of healthy diets for low-income households.

Among the findings presented at the briefing are that it is up to 10 times cheaper to provide calories in the form of unhealthy foods which are high in fat, salt and sugar, than from healthy alternatives such as fruit, vegetables, lean meat and fish. The study also found that the choice of places to shop in communities has a big impact on dietary choice, with local convenience stores being up to twice as expensive for the purchase of healthy foods.

According to Marjo Moonen, Chair of HFfA, social welfare and child benefit cuts would put a healthy diet even further out of reach for low-income households.

"Government policy must address the financial and other barriers to healthy eating," she said. "At a minimum, welfare rates must not be reduced, as this would only further restrict low-income families from eating a healthy diet. We know that a healthy diet helps to prevent heart disease, stroke, cancers and obesity. All households, regardless of their income, have a right to food that provides adequate nutrition and protection against common diseases. Furthermore, by ensuring that low-income households have access to healthy foods, we could save the Government – and ultimately the taxpayer – money in the longer term."

Apart from recommending no reduction in welfare payments, HFfA made a number of other recommendations at today's launch, among them a call for joined-up Government thinking across all departments and state agencies to ensure access to healthy foods.

"Healthy eating is not just the responsibility of one department," said Ms. Moonen. "The Department of Health has an obvious responsibility to reduce the effects of unhealthy diets; the Department of Education plays a big part in shaping the dietary habits of young children for their lifetime, and welfare and benefit rates set by the Department of Social and Family Affairs influence how much people can afford to spend on their food shopping."

"However, there are many less obvious ways in which Government can ensure low-income households have better diets. For example, planning guidelines can impact hugely by ensuring that new communities

have access to different shops that provide choice at affordable prices. Enhanced local transport systems also give power to local people by widening access to shops which provide cheaper healthy foods.”

HFfA also called for alternative non-commercial ways of providing healthy food to be explored. These could include the development of community food initiatives, such as food cooperatives, and the expansion of school food initiatives.

Healthy Food for All (HFfA) is an all-island multi-agency initiative, which promotes access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups. The organisation supports local initiatives that promote availability and access to healthy and affordable food for low-income groups, with a focus on community food initiatives and direct food provision, including school meals. The initiative also promotes awareness of food poverty among politicians and policymakers.

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Notes:

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