

Mapping UNSW Impact Global Development

Primary SDG	3: GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
Broad theme	Reducing salt intake
Research	Measuring salt intake in diets and implementing strategies to reduce salt and blood pressure levels
Impact region	The Pacific, Vietnam
Faculty	Medicine
School/Institute	George Institute
Academic	Associate Professor Jacqui Webster
Project partners	WHO, Ministry of Health in Fiji and Sama, C-pond (Pacific Centre for Research in Obesity and NCDs), Deakin University, NHMRC - \$1.2 million, Food and Agriculture Organisation – \$120,000 for 2018
Related SDGs	16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
	10: Reduced Inequalities

Elevator pitch

Jacqui is working with countries in the Pacific and around the world to implement salt reduction strategies to reduce blood pressure levels and food policy interventions to tackle obesity, diabetes and diet-related diseases that result in premature death.

The Challenge: High salt intake is one of the major causes of premature death worldwide

Eating too much salt increases a person's blood pressure, which increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes. It is estimated that approximately 2.5 million lives per year could be saved through salt reduction programs globally. Salt reduction is also one of the top five cost effective interventions to reduce non communicable diseases, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

In the Pacific Islands, there is currently a NCD crisis with some of the highest rates in the world. Poor diet is the primary cause with people eating increasing amounts of highly processed foods, such as tinned meat and fish, packet noodles, chips and crackers, as well as increasing quantities of take-way food. An increasing number of people under the age of 50 are dying from NCDs.

UNSW's solution: Partner with countries to reduce salt in food industry and raise public awareness

In 2010, Jacqui was invited to attend the Pacific Island Ministerial Food Forum and discuss the cost effectiveness of reducing salt in food. She was then invited by the Fijian Minister of Health to facilitate a salt reduction strategy in Fiji. As a result of this work, the WHO agreed to collaborate to support salt reduction in 10 of the Pacific Island's 22 countries over the next two years (2010-2012).

In partnership with Deakin University, Jacqui then secured funding for a four year National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funded program to reduce salt intake in Fiji and Samoa (2012-2016). The investigator team worked with governments in these countries to measure base line levels of salt intake, foods that contribute to salt, and consumer knowledge, attitudes and behaviours relating to salt. They then implemented strategies to reduce salt, including developing voluntary salt level targets in foods such as bread, tinned meat, tinned fish and noodles, and the implementation of national campaigns to raise awareness about the dangers of salt. Evaluations showed that while there was no statistically significant reduction in population salt intake in either country, likely due to the short intervention duration, there were clear positive trends in consumer behaviour, new government policies and frameworks for action, and greater local capacity for research.

As Director of the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre on Population Salt Reduction, Jacqui is still collaborating with Pacific countries to monitor salt intake levels and implement strategies. In collaboration with Deakin University and the University of Sydney, she recently obtained funding from the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation to work with government organisations in Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Tonga to strengthen and monitor food policy interventions. Jacqui is also currently undertaking WHO-funded qualitative research in Vietnam, Mongolia, South Africa and Argentina to consolidate best practices for implementing salt reduction programs in low and middle-income countries. Argentina and South Africa have both adopted legislative approaches to salt reduction, and the Mongolian government reduced salt through a program with factory workers. The program is trying to understand what is effective and what isn't, and whether such strategies can be adapted and implemented in other countries.

The Impact: Reduce salt in food, lower blood pressure and risk of NCD

Jacqui's work is helping countries to ensure there is less salt in foods and meals, and it is educating people about the health benefits of lower salt in the diet. Lower salt levels mean lower blood pressure for people, reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease and strokes. Her work has also helped people in the Pacific to reduce the consumption of processed foods, which are high in salt and sugar, helping these countries to address high rates of obesity and diabetes. Local capacity in government departments around raising awareness and engaging with the food industry to implement salt reduction strategies has been boosted thanks to Jacqui's efforts, and local researchers are now able to lead projects around salt intake and reduction strategies.

Researcher

Jacqui Webster is an Associate Professor at UNSW and Sydney University, and Director of the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre on Population Salt Reduction at the George Institute. This Centre has a remit to support countries to achieve a 30% reduction in salt by 2025. She has extensive experience implementing complex public health interventions in the UK, The Netherlands, The Pacific Islands, Mongolia, Vietnam and Australia. Jacqui is currently supported by a NHMRC Fellowship and a Heart Foundation Future Leaders Award. She is passionate about food and committed to tackling non communicable diseases.

Ben Falkenmire 16.07.18