

ANDRES MANUEL LOPEZ OBRADOR
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED MEXICAN STATES

Dear Mr President Lopez Obrador,

On behalf of the NCD Alliance, a recognised global organisation that advocates for the prevention and control of NCDs, we would like to congratulate and extend our support for the recently approved reforms by the Congress and your government for a new front-of-package (FOP) warning labelling of foods and beverages, which includes a 2019 reform of the General Health Law and the recently approved 2020 modification to the Mexican Norm NOM-051 on labelling of pre-packaged foods and non-alcoholic beverages. Both reforms are the result of joint efforts between your government, academia and civil society organisations, representing a true commitment and a step towards obesity prevention, which has become one of the most important health epidemics in Mexico.

Currently NCDs are the largest cause of death and disability in the world, causing 41 million deaths worldwide every year, of which 75% occur in low and middle-income countries. The region of the Americas, and thus Mexico, is particularly affected by NCDs, representing one of the largest challenges for its social and economic development. The region has the highest prevalence of overweight and obesity in the world¹, and in Mexico 7 out of 10 adults and 1 out of 3 children live with overweight or obesity. By being chronic, NCDs become a financial burden for families, disproportionately affecting women, girls and people with low incomes, and are particularly worrying in contexts with low or minimum access to health services.

Addressing NCDs and obesity through the cost-effective, evidence-based policies recommended by the World Health Organization², including through FOP labelling, is a necessary and viable step to reduce the consumption of unhealthy products. This policy, along with an integral framework of NCD and obesity prevention and control policies, will allow your government to have a healthier population, especially among those more vulnerable. It will also help advance towards fulfilling your government delivering on internationally agreed targets and commitments, particularly the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

This new policy helps position Mexico as a leader and reference point in NCD and obesity prevention, and in the protection of consumers' rights, particularly the right to access information. By adopting this new FOP warning labelling regulation, Mexico will become the most populated country with one of the easiest to read and to understand labelling systems, informing its population, including children, about the contents of the products they eat, such as calories, fats (including trans fats), sugars and sodium. This new labelling is based on the latest scientific evidence and on the most solid nutrient profiles developed by the Pan American Health Organization.

¹ Pan American Health Organization (2016). *Core Indicators 2016: Health Situation in the Americas*. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Sy96KH>

² World Health Organization (2017). *"Best buys" and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/37VWwpp>

The new FOP warning labelling approved in Mexico is modelled following the successful labelling system that Chile adopted in 2015. Counter to what the food and beverage industry has falsely claimed, an evaluation of the comprehensive obesity prevention policy package adopted in Chile, including regulations on child-targeted marketing, a ban in sales of unhealthy products in schools and a FOP warning labelling, demonstrates that purchases of SSBs decreased by 23.7% between 2015 and 2017³. This reduction is larger than that observed from standalone policies, such as taxation only, in other countries in Latin America like Mexico. This is an important takeaway for Mexico, as it shows that NCD and obesity prevention policies have a greater impact when adopted in a comprehensive manner. The positive impact observed from the existing taxes on SSBs and unhealthy foods in your country can potentially be strengthened through this new labelling system. This is powerful evidence against industry claims that Chile hasn't seen any positive outcomes from its regulation and thus Mexico will not see them either.

The NCD Alliance expresses its full support to the Mexican government, especially considering the recent court ruling promoted by several industry groups to stall the publication and the process of implementation of the 2020 modifications to the Mexican Norm NOM-051 on FOP labelling. We acknowledge that your government has already listened to and is now facing great pressures from private sector stakeholders who publicly deny the scientific evidence supporting the policy, who are threatening with appealing against this measure, and have launched campaigns against the new regulation in a vested interest in stopping this policy from being implemented. All these are tactics used by the food and beverage industries around the world and which governments and advocates need to resist and stand in solidarity against.

We call on the Mexican government to demonstrate its commitment to protect the health of its population by publishing these reforms on the new FOP warning labelling in the official gazette, in order to start the implementation process of such an important public health policy. The interest in Mexico's population health must prevail over the economic interests of individual groups. Mexican people are clearly on your side: 8 out of 10 support a FOP warning labelling⁴.

Policies like this one will allow Mexico and the region to advance towards the prevention of NCDs and obesity. The NCD Alliance joins the chorus of national and international support Mexico has received after the adoption of this new FOP warning labelling, and stands ready to support your government to promote and adopt this and other internationally recommended NCD and obesity prevention and control policies.

Sincerely,



Katie Dain
CEO, NCD Alliance, kdain@ncdalliance.org

With copy to: Dr Graciela Marquez Colin. Minister of Economy, Government of Mexico
Dr Jorge Alcocer Varela. Minister of Health, Government of Mexico

³ Taillie LS, Reyes M, Colchero A, Popkin B, Corvalan C (2020). An evaluation of Chile's Law of Food Labeling and Advertising on sugar-sweetened beverage purchases from 2015 to 2017: A before-and-after study. PLoS Med 17(2): e1003015. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003015>

⁴ El Poder del Consumidor (2018). Encuesta Nacional sobre Obesidad 2018. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2uv0xmR>