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A 'whole of society' approach will support Singapore's war on diabetes
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Food Industry Asia (FIA) welcomes Health Minister Gan Kim Yong announcement in Parliament on April 13 of a war on diabetes and plans to set up of a task force made up of representatives from government agencies, the private sector, patient advocacy and caregiver groups.

Our association has always advocated a whole of society approach to tackle obesity and non-communicable disease (NCD), and it is encouraging to see the Government's forward thinking and inclusive approach to tackling this burgeoning crisis in Singapore.

The increasing rates of diabetes are not just limited to Singapore. In South-East Asia, experts warn that the rise in obesity rates is likely to put more individuals at risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, which will have an impact on the health of the region's population, as well as its health systems. According to the WHO, between the years 2000 and 2030, the prevalence of diabetes is expected to more than double in the Asean Six - Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam - as obesity rates continue to rise.

The number of obese adults in the Asean Six increased at a faster rate than that of the United Kingdom and the United States from 2010 to 2014, according to data gathered by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) in an inception report The Current Landscape and State of Health in Relation to Obesity in South-East Asia, commissioned by the Asia Roundtable on Food Innovation for Improved Nutrition (ARoFIIN). According to this EIU report, 6.2 per cent of Singapore's adult population is considered obese as at 2014 which was a 24 per cent change in the number of obese adults from 2010 to 2014.

The global diabetes challenge has triggered debates and motivated partnerships among governments, public health bodies, non-governmental organisations, think tanks and the food industry worldwide, as key stakeholders look to develop solutions to help tackle this complex health and nutrition issue. As part of its mission, FIA is harnessing the power of partnership to launch a multi-stakeholder regional effort to improve diets and attempt to stabilise the rates of obesity and NCDs in Asia.

Therefore, we welcome the setting up of a new Diabetes Prevention and Care Taskforce co-chaired by Mr Gan and Acting Education Minister Ng Chee Meng. We are especially encouraged by the minister's comment that the task force will include representatives from government agencies, the private sector, patient advocacy and caregiver groups.



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In response to Asia's growing obesity and NCD issues, ARoFIIN was jointly convened in 2015 by the Health Promotion Board, A*Star and the Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences and formally launched in January 2016 in Singapore, to leverage public-private partnerships and bring together experts from across government, academia, industry and civil society, to initiate and sustain a regional, multi-stakeholder dialogue on the role of food innovation in tackling obesity, chronic disease and malnutrition.

During this period, ARoFIIN, in which FIA is a core partner, has come a long way in galvanising efforts to pursue an integrated approach to solving some of the biggest health challenges in the region.

The food industry has an important role to play, too. Recognising that healthy eating is a key factor in the fight against diabetes, FIA members share common values on the responsible promotion of balanced diets and lifestyles. FIA members continually improve product offerings to create products that offer healthier options with more whole grains and fibre, more calcium, vitamins and minerals, more low-fat dairy, more vegetables and fruit, reduced sodium, less fat, less sugar and fewer calories.

Public Private Partnerships such as ARoFIIN play an increasingly important part of the debate on diabetes in Singapore and other countries in the region. FIA looks forward to participating and contributing to the government's plans to tackle this societal challenge.