



Action taken by Wicklow County Council to protect children's health recognised at national obesity conference in the lead up to European Obesity Day

14 May, 2018. The food environment plays a key role in obesity according to a range of national and international speakers at the national ASOI 2018 obesity conference in Dublin today. Delegates at the Association for the Study of Obesity on the Island of Ireland (ASOI) 6th Annual Conference heard about the complex environmental factors that influence food consumption and obesity rates including portion size, proximity of fast food outlets to schools, and the digital media environment. The evaluation of the recently introduced sugar sweetened beverage drinks levy was also discussed.

At the seminar, the ASOI presented Councillor Derek Mitchell, Cathaoirleach of Greystones Municipal District, Wicklow County Council, with its Inaugural ASOI Award of Recognition. The award recognises the commitment that Wicklow County Council has shown in the area of public health. Wicklow County Council has shown exemplary vision through the translation of research evidence into practice on the ground, with their support of the No Fry Zone initiative.

On receiving the award, Councillor Mitchell said: "I am delighted to accept this award on behalf of Wicklow County Council in recognition of being the first county in Ireland to include an objective in its County Development Plan excluding any new fast food/take-away outlets from being built or from operating within 400m of schools or playgrounds".

Speaking about the event, Dr Grace O'Malley, representative of the European Childhood Obesity Task Force and StAR Research Lecturer at the Division of Population Health Sciences, Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland, said: "This Saturday (19th May) marks European Obesity Day, which brings together healthcare, patient and political communities who are keen to raise awareness of obesity and the many other diseases on which it impacts. The theme this year is *Tackling Obesity Together*. With the World Health Organisation estimating that the number of Europeans living with obesity has more than tripled since the 1980s, we need all sectors and actors to take real, concerted action to address this important public health issue. We need actions at all levels, including those which focus on creating supportive environments for health. These include policy actions such as applying duties and taxes to the non-nutritious edible products, planning restrictions on fast food outlets, as well as the implementation of mandatory regulations for online marketing targeted at children and young people.

Dr Jean O'Connell, Chair of the Association for the Study of Obesity on the island of Ireland (ASOI) commented: "Today's conference is an important milestone as the ASOI prepares to host the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO) and the World Obesity Federation's first joint ECO – ICO conference in 2020. Controlling the marketing of non-nutritious edible products to children is one of the legacy aims of the international conference which will bring global experts in the fields of obesity and public health to the Convention Centre in Dublin."

Throughout the day, delegates heard about a range of environmental factors which influence food consumption and obesity: Prof Moira Dean (Queen's University Belfast) spoke about how portion size decisions are made within families and the subsequent impacts on food consumption. Dr Mimi Tatlow-Golden (The Open University) drew on two ground-breaking reports, the Irish Heart Foundation's "Who's Feeding the Kids Online" and the subsequent WHO report "Tackling food marketing to children in a digital world", to examine unhealthy food marketing in digital media, identify tactics used, their impact, the challenges we face, and potential harms, including lifelong harms from online profiling, before outlining ways forward. Mr Phil Moyles (Chair, No Fry Zone 4 Kids Committee) highlighted the impact of easy access to unhealthy food high in fat, salt and sugar at low prices on children when fast food outlets are located within 400 metres of a school and the process involved in embedding No Fry Zone objectives in local environmental development plans. Prof Gerardine Doyle (University College Dublin) addressed the topic of taxation of sugar-sweetened beverages and proposed a framework for its evaluation.

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For more information or to request an interview please contact

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Editor's notes

1. About ASOI: The Association for the Study of Obesity on the Island of Ireland (ASOI) is the Irish representative body at the European Association for the Study of Obesity and the World Obesity Federation. ASOI aims to develop an understanding of obesity through the pursuit of excellence in research and education, the facilitation of contact between individuals and organisations, and the promotion of action to prevent and treat obesity, across the island of Ireland. See asoi.web.ie for details.
2. For more information about European Obesity Day visit <https://www.europeanobesityday.eu>