

A stylized landscape illustration featuring rolling hills in shades of green and brown. A path of white footprints winds across the hills, suggesting movement and activity. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

# John White

**Building an active-friendly New Zealand**

**The time to start is now**

**Living Streets Aotearoa**



# Building an active-friendly New Zealand: The time to start is now

John White

White, John. *The Health Select Committee Inquiry into Obesity and Type Two Diabetes in New Zealand: A backseat for physical activity.*

Available from [www.livingstreets.org.nz](http://www.livingstreets.org.nz)

# The Health Select Committee Inquiry into Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes

- February 2006 – Inquiry announced
- March 2006 – Closing date for submissions
- May 2006 – Hearings commence
- August 2007 – Committee reports
- November 2007 – Government responds

# The 314 submissions by "sector"

■ Health	143
■ Physical Activity	35
■ Nutrition	30
■ Breastfeeding	9
■ Food and advertising industries	21
■ Other	76

# The 35 “physical activity” submissions

■ Central government (SPARC & MoT)	2
■ Regional Sports Trusts	8
■ Academic groups	2
■ Academic individuals	3
■ Other groups	14
■ Other individuals	6

# Changing the built environment

Encouraging more walking requires planning policies that promote high density, mixed-use, urban areas that keep distances short. Walking routes need to be safe, continuous, well-connected to key destinations, and well-signed. At major intersections pedestrians need to be given priority.

*He Kainga Oranga: Housing and Health Research Programme, Wellington School of Medicine and Health Services*

# Changing the built environment

“The most effective environmental interventions will increase the cost of sedentary transportation while reducing the costs of active forms of transportation.”

*Living Streets Aotearoa*



# Changing the built environment

Some form of change to the built environment to encourage *greater physical activity* (including active transport and active recreation) was proposed in 92 of the 314 submissions (29%)

# The Health Select Committee Report

## Recommendations relating to:

■ Both healthy eating and healthy action	15
■ Healthy eating alone	23
■ Healthy action alone	0
■ Neither healthy eating nor healthy action	17
Total:	55

# The Government Response

## New actions:

■ Healthy eating alone	12
■ Healthy action alone	0
■ Both or neither	11
Total:	23

# Arguments for giving priority to healthy eating

- For obesity prevention, reducing energy in will be more effective than increasing energy out (the “academic argument”)

# Arguments for giving priority to healthy eating

- It will be easier to implement measures to improve diet than to increase physical activity (the “pragmatic argument”)

# Arguments for giving priority to healthy eating

- The food industry attempts to avoid regulation by emphasising the importance of physical activity, so we should counter this by downplaying the importance of physical activity (the “political argument”)

# Arguments for giving priority to healthy eating

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# Why healthy action is critical for obesity prevention

No major high quality review suggests that diet is more important than physical activity. For example:

“Two priority interventions important in preventing the development of obesity have been identified in this report, namely increasing levels of physical activity and improving the quality of the diet.”\*

\*WHO Consultation. *Obesity: Preventing and managing the global epidemic*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2000, p180.



# Why healthy action is critical for health in general

Major reviews on the prevention of non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, cancer and type 2 diabetes all have a very similar message. For example, the first three recommendations from the 2007 Cancer Report on nutrition and physical activity are:

- 1. Be as lean as possible within the normal range of body weight*
- 2. Be physically active as part of everyday life*
- 3. Limit consumption of energy-dense foods and avoid sugary drinks.\**

*\*World Cancer Research Fund / American Institute for Cancer Research. Food, nutrition, physical activity, and the prevention of cancer: A global perspective. Washington DC., 2007.*

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# Arguments for giving priority to healthy eating

- We should down play the importance of physical activity to counter the food industry's attempt to avoid regulation by emphasising the importance of physical activity in reducing obesity (the "political argument")

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- Sticking to the script promotes unity
- Mixed messages don't help people
- Mixed messages give politicians easy escape routes
- Everyone needs encouragement to do what they can
- Mixed messages help the food industry avoid responsibility



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