

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

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”)

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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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- Everyone needs encouragement to do what they can

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