

Speech: Sugary Drink Free Pacific by 2030? NZ by 2025? - Tariana Turia

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Sugary Drink Free Pacific by 2030? NZ by 2025? Options to reduce sugar sweetened beverage consumption in New Zealand University of Auckland (Due to flight cancellations caused by fog in Wellington this speech was delivered by Dr Lisa Te Morenga on behalf of Hon Tariana Turia)

I want to firstly acknowledge our international dignitaries:

- Professor Richard Johnson; Professor Robert Lustig and the fourteen members of the Project Citizen Team from Colorado, USA;
- Dr Mike Rayner from the United Kingdom
- Dr Paula Vivili from New Caledonia
- Dr Wendy Snowden from Fiji
- Damon Gameau and Dr Kieron Rooney from Australia

It is a very distinguished line up from right across the globe; and I am so pleased that together, we are reaching out to provide leadership in addressing an issue which is so closely related to the wellbeing, the mauri, the life force of our people.

I believe that you are all now fully equipped to speak with authority about the science of sugar, and sugar-sweetened beverage while at the same time considering public health solutions to highlight the importance of sugar as a health issue.

In the time I have with you I want to focus my korero around the importance of family as the champions of a total health approach.

I was raised in the era in which we associated sugar with a sweetness that became synonymous with the good things in life.

We were told “sugar and spice; and all things nice, that’s what little girls are made of”. Sugar represented the ultimate bliss - the sticky toffee; steamed pudding and golden syrup; fried bread and jam. Even now when theoretically I know better, it’s hard to resist the temptation of a sweet treat.

As a new mum, I raised children in the era in which Mary Poppins sang, “just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down in a most delightful way.” I was told that when baby cried, a wee bit of sugar in their bottle wouldn’t hurt. It seemed, there was nothing that a spoon of sugar couldn’t fix.

And today I see some of the parties my mokopuna go to, with tables groaning under the weight of plastic bottles of lime, orange, raspberry and coke fizzy; fancy cupcakes laced with psychedelic icing; and lollies of all description liberally sprinkled in every free space.

From our earliest days, we are learning that the more sugar we eat, the more we want. And fatally, our sugar addiction is literally killing us.

Cardiovascular disease kill huge numbers of people to the extent that we have almost become immune to the news of people dying from heart attacks or eventually from strokes.

The prevalence of type two diabetes is increasing so rapidly that the World Health Organisation characterise it as an epidemic. Too much sugar in the blood can cause permanent damage to the kidneys, eyes, arms and legs; often leading to blindness, kidney damage and amputation.

So let’s go back to that harmless bottle of Fanta; and the focus of this symposium. In February 2012 Parliament’s Health Select Committee initiated an inquiry to find out what practical interventions can be made to promote child wellbeing. Three months ago the Committee reported back with a comprehensive series of some 130 recommendations.

Recommendation 44 was particularly relevant for today’s hui:

“We recommend to the Government that it carry out research on the possibility of regulating the amount of sugar in beverages or imposing a tax on beverages that contain unhealthy amounts of sugar. The options should be made public within 18 months of this report being published”. The Māori Party has absolutely welcomed this report - and recommendation 44 in particular - in highlighting the importance of a great start for all of our children.

And I want to place on the record our determination to raise the issues around the importance of sugar as a health issue, within two contexts.

The first is the discussion of excessive sugar intake as a social hazard. The Māori Party has championed a campaign to keep our families strong, healthy and intact by protecting them against activities or substances which are known to be hazardous to people’s health.

Our advocacy for tobacco reform; the prevention of problem gambling harm; and speaking out against the misuse and abuse of alcohol are all approaches we have taken to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the people of this nation.

I am particularly proud with the momentum that has been achieved in our work to remove tobacco displays from sight; to increase tobacco excise and to introduce plain packaging.

We are not finished yet by any means, but the signs are definitely there, that the tobacco industry is transitioning into what we describe as a sunset industry; as we look towards a Smokefree Aotearoa by 2025.

What this goes to show, is that government has lead change before in the elimination of social hazards before - and we can do so again. We must do so, if we truly care about investing in our future.

Our view is that in the fight against obesity and in our determination to promote oral health; taxation of sugar sweetened beverages is one very good idea that should be looked at.

The second context is that of Whanau Ora.

Around the same time the Health Committee report landed, there was another inquiry report into the determinants of wellbeing for tamariki Māori.

That report began with the concept - it takes a village to raise a child.

Ko te tamaiti he taonga mo te pa tuwatawata Ko te pa tuwatawata he whakaruruhau mo te tamaiti

The submissions received on that report were unanimous in their understanding that the wellbeing of tamariki Māori is inextricable from the wellbeing of their whānau. Whether we are talking identity, leadership, relationships, capacity or resourcing - the empowerment of the whānau to take back control of their circumstances is paramount. And I want to just plant the seed of thinking even further back in our history, as to where our sugar addiction may have begun.

Increasing British settlement of New Zealand from the 1840s led to increased economic interaction between Māori and Pākehā. The settler desire for land resulted in a diverse range of strategies including the so-called Flour and Sugar policy of Governor Grey in which benevolent aid to Māori was targeted in areas where he hoped to acquire land.

And so the spoonful of sugar became another layer in our national story of land alienation, dispossession, confiscation and raupatu.

I paint this picture in order to reacquaint us all with the knowledge that the relationship between our people and sugar intake is not just a contemporary phenomenon. It has built up over generations and cannot be turned around easily. We need to operate on many fronts to address the impacts of that relationship with sugar - and its long-term impact on weight gain, and the heightened risk of diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Admittedly the risks have been escalated by our recent lifestyle changes; including a two hundred percent increase in the consumption of soft drinks in New Zealand over the last two decades.

But we must never give up hope, or lose the imagination that we can create our own solutions; we can make the difference we need to make.

Just twenty four hours ago I had a family from Taumarunui drive down to see me, who between them had lost an excessive amount of weight; over 500kg; and more importantly gained a huge appreciation of life through a healthy nutrition and exercise project they owned and drove themselves.

The motivation was set for them within their own whānau. They knew that if their mauri is out of balance - their wairua was out of balance; if their capacity to live life to the fullest was

compromised, then that would have profound physical, mental, emotional and spiritual impacts.

This family lived by the maxim - we must see it before we can be it. They visualised life as a healthy, strong and flourishing whanau - and that is exactly the picture they have achieved for themselves. And in doing that, they have motivated and inspired hundreds of others to join their crusade.

And so I have been thinking about that whanau; and the vexed question that Gareth Morgan raises - 'How much nutritionally pointless junk we can handle in our diet.'

How do we operate by a set of values in the choices we make about our life? How do we as families, understand that consuming more than ten percent sugar in a daily food intake leads to a higher risk of dental problems as well as contributing to weight gain?

When we talk health literacy; let's go that one step further - do we truly understand what we are putting into our bodies each day - the refined grains, the saturated fats, salt, sugar, the nature of the highly processed foods too many of us digest without the blink of an eyelid.

But perhaps the even more pressing question is - do we know what will help to make us well - how do we work together, talk together, to eat healthily; to be physically active; to share the decisions around what goes in the grocery trolley; to step up to the plate, literally, and help create a more nutritious menu for life.

Finally, I am absolutely delighted to launch the New Zealand Beverage Guidance Panel which identifies key aspirational - yet achievable - goals to various sectors of influence to limit the intake of sugar sweetened beverages.

The policy brief outlines six points of influence across government, education, industry, advocacy, health and community / NGO sectors.

The Māori Party is proud to be associated with such a strong framework to promote and create healthier food environments. And I want to end with one note of caution before the predictable calls of 'nanny state' politics come to light.

Every time I have stood up for what I know to be right, I think of my nanny.

Every time I operate from a value basis; taking into account the broader needs of the collective as opposed to my own individual choice, I remember what my nanny taught me; Ehara taku toa, he takitahi, he toa takitini. Our success will not come from just acting on our own accord; our success will come as a collective; acting on behalf of us all.

Every time I act on behalf of my 26 mokopuna and 23 mokopuna tuarua, thinking about their best interests; I am meeting my obligations as a nanny.

When I look at the faces of the primary school age students that have joined us from Colorado; the young rangatahi from Kelston Girls and Boys Colleges; and I think of their right to live a full and prosperous life, I know that every Nanny in the world would agree that we should do whatever it takes to make the difference.

So if being a Nanny state is what it takes to make the difference, well this Nanny is right on board.

Tena tatou katoa.