MEDIA RELEASE

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Health groups unite to tackle obesity

A group of Queensland’s peak non-government health organisations are working together to reduce lifestyle diseases that are killing people before their time.

Led by Diabetes Queensland, the Heart Foundation, Cancer Council Queensland and Nutrition Australia Qld are collaborating in support of the national Swap It, Don’t Stop It campaign to draw attention to the links between obesity and chronic diseases and urge people to take steps for better health.

Diabetes Queensland CEO Michelle Trute said obesity had reached epidemic proportions in Queensland, putting a high proportion of the population at risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.

“Our expanding waistlines are the common risk factor for developing these diseases,” she said.

“More than half the adult population now weighs more than recommended for good health – one in three adults is overweight and one in four is obese.”

Heart Foundation CEO Cameron Prout said obesity was a major cause of premature death and disability in the state.

“Largely preventable chronic diseases cause more than 22,000 deaths in Queensland each year – that’s almost double the national road toll,” he said.

“Although higher numbers of people are at risk in larger metropolitan populations, statistics show those in regional and remote communities of the state are 15 per cent more likely to be overweight or obese than those living in cities.”

Cancer Council Queensland CEO Professor Jeff Dunn said the campaign would focus on community awareness and action.

“We know that one in three cancers can be prevented with simple lifestyle changes, including eating healthily, moving more and maintaining a healthy weight.” he said.

“That is why we are combining our resources in support of the Swap It, Don’t Stop It campaign to urge individuals at risk, and those who already have chronic diseases, to take action.”

Although the message is relevant to everyone, Nutrition Australia Qld Nutrition Program Manager Aloysa Hourigan said the group effort was being directed at 25-50 year olds throughout the state.
“The beauty of the Swap It campaign is the practical way it encourages people to make simple, incremental changes in their everyday lives, in their own way and their own time,” she said.

“It’s about small actions that can make a big difference to your overall health - swapping big meal portions for small, eating fewer treats and being more physically active by moving rather than sitting and playing instead of watching.”

If current trends continue, Ms Trute said diabetes rates were likely to double and about 65 per cent of Queenslanders would be overweight or obese by 2020.

“Unless action is taken now to eat healthily, move more and lose weight, we face being the first generation of Queenslanders not to outlive our parents. Collectively we are saying enough is enough before chronic disease becomes an even greater burden on the community, our home lives, work productivity and economic prosperity,” she said.

“It’s time for all of us to take responsibility for our own health by becoming community of swappers rather than statistics.”

The non government health organisations’ collaborative Swap It project is funded by Queensland Health to June 2013 under the National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health, as part of a joint Australian, State and Territory Government initiative.

For information on how to become a swapper, visit www.swapit.gov.au. ENDS

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The 'Swap It' campaign is a joint Australian, State and Territory Government initiative under the National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health