

Fruit and vegetable intake declines among kids, calls for better regulation of fast food outlets

Hannah Martin 11:32, Aug 22 2019

STUFF

New Zealand has one of the highest childhood obesity rates in the world but new research has shown it's going down - if only by a small fraction.

Some of Auckland's most deprived neighbourhoods have hundreds of food options available at the press of a button but "none of them are healthy".

That's according to new research which highlighted fast food outlet density and the proliferation of food delivery apps were among a number of barriers preventing Kiwi children eating well.

The finding comes as the number of Kiwi kids eating enough fruit and vegetables is declining across the country, with half of 2-14 year olds not getting the recommended amount of vegetables.

Healthy Families Waitākere (HFW) and University of Auckland researchers wanted to find out why.

They teamed up to run four workshops in West Auckland, asking parents, community leaders and iwi what they thought were barriers to their children eating enough fruit and vegetables.



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Only half of New Zealand children aged between 2 and 14 are eating the recommended servings of vegetables.

[A study based on their findings](#) was published in international scientific journal *PLOS ONE* this week.

Over the past three years, the New Zealand Health Survey found fruit and vegetable intake was lowest in Auckland, where only 42 per cent of children were eating '5+ A Day'.

This was even lower among non-European children and those in deprived areas.

The study community was selected because of its high proportion of Pacific and Southeast Asian families, who tend to have the lowest fruit and vegetable intake, University of Auckland research fellow Sarah Gerritsen said.



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Healthy Families Waitākere systems innovator Michele Eickstaedt says the workshops validated what they already knew - that West Auckland families want to change their eating habits, but there's "only so much they can do".

It also did not have access to the Government's **Fruit in Schools programme.**

Community members identified the **high cost of fresh produce**, the **high volume of fast food promotion and advertising**; and **fast food outlets** in their neighbourhoods, and **parents being time-poor** as key barriers preventing kids getting enough fruit and vegetables.

Co-author and HFW systems innovator Michele Eickstaedt said the workshops highlighted two barriers out of the community's control – the toll **low-income work** has on health, and the **density of fast food outlets** in their neighbourhoods.

Parents were working multiple low-wage jobs, bound by inflexible hours, Parents were working **multiple low-wage jobs**, bound by **inflexible hours**, leaving them **little time to cook** and leading to a **lack of cooking skills at home**, she said.



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University of Auckland research fellow Dr Sarah Gerritsen said there was "certainly more" the Government could be doing to support low-income families wanting to eat well.

Participants said families with **low budgets** were also more likely to prioritise being full over eating healthily, she said.

Gerritsen said the **number of fast food outlets** and **advertising** in the area had "ramped up dramatically" in the past five years, with services such as **UberEats** meaning junk food is "literally everywhere".

Food options available in low income communities tend to be "much worse" than those available in the CBD – while there was a "huge selection", all were unhealthy, she said.

Gerritsen backed participants' calls for government regulation of the fast food sector to address advertising standards and outlet density.

"Communities cannot tackle these systemic issues on their own," she said.

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