



# FNU collaboration shows eating less salt could save many lives in Fiji

**Suva, Fiji.** A Fiji National University (FNU) collaborative research project shows that a minimal government investment in reducing salt intake could prevent 234 heart attacks and 72 strokes, resulting in 131 Fijian lives saved, and saving the government nearly 2 million FJD each year.

The study - *The Potential Impact of Salt Reduction in Fiji* - was carried out by Health Technology Analysts as part of a collaboration between the Pacific Research Centre for the Prevention of Obesity and Non-Communicable Diseases (C-POND), a WHO Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention and Management at the Fiji Institute of Pacific Health Research (FIPHR), the research arm of the College of Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences (CMNHS) and leading Australian Universities. The report highlighted that the current average daily salt intake in Fiji is 11.7 grams per day, more than twice the WHO recommended level of 5 grams per day.

C-POND, which has received visibility and recognition by national and international authorities for its work on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Fiji and the Pacific region, worked with The George Institute (TGI) for Global Health, Deakin University and the University of Sydney to obtain Australian National Health and Medical Council funding on strengthening and monitoring food policy in the Pacific Islands. This new report demonstrated that a minimal investment in a salt reduction program is likely to yield a positive social return on investment by reducing blood pressure and preventing cardiovascular diseases in Fiji.

Dr. Gade Waqa, the Head of C-POND, at the FNU's College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences Research Unit said this research project capitalizes on the benefits of implementing salt reduction programs throughout Fiji, leading to the prevention of stroke and Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) events.

"More than half of all strokes and CHD events are attributable to high blood pressure. Salt reduction is widely recognised as one of the most cost-effective means for preventing NCDs around the world and needs to be a priority for Fiji," stated Dr. Waqa.

CMNHS Associate Dean Research and Director of FIPHR, Dr. Donald Wilson advised that salt intake is known to have strong associations with high blood pressure, which is steadily on the rise in Fiji and the region.



He further added that studies such as this one will generate the local evidence required to inform relevant policies of government which would eventually result in saved lives and reduction of associated healthcare costs.

The comprehensive report also found that implementing a salt reduction program would save the government \$1.8 million (FJD) through reduced costs to society.

Professor Jacqui Webster from The George Institute for Global Health said that the investment required was surprisingly small.

“To achieve these savings, the amount that the government in Fiji would need to spend is just \$2.04 (FJD) per person per year,” she said.

Professor Webster is Head of the Public Health Advocacy and Policy Impact and the Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Salt Reduction at The George Institute, UNSW Sydney, and Chief Investigator on the NHMRC grant supporting this work.