

## Abstract

# How Healthy Are Aotearoa New Zealand's Food Environments? Assessing the Impact of Recent Food Policies 2018–2021 <sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** Food policies can make healthier foods more accessible for the population. In this study, progress on implementing recent policies and commitments of the government and food companies was monitored. Sub-studies were conducted following INFORMAS (International Network for Obesity/non-communicable diseases, Research, Monitoring and Action Support) protocols: benchmarking government implementation of healthy food policies; the impact of a voluntary advertising code on the exposure of children to unhealthy food marketing; the impact of healthy food and drink policies on retailers in district health boards and on the beverage environments in leisure centres; supermarket retail environments; food composition and display of the 'Health Star Rating'; and commitments of food companies to nutrition. The level of implementation of food policy by the New Zealand government has not improved over nine years. The voluntary Children and Young People's Advertising Code is too weak to have an impact on the exposure of children to unhealthy food marketing. Improvements to the beverage environment in leisure centres occurred where sufficient support was available, and all District Health Boards adopted a healthy food policy. There is considerable variation in the actions of the major food companies: in 2019 the Health Star Rating was displayed on 94% of private label products but only 25% of packaged foods overall; one-third of supermarkets did not have a check-out free of junk food, and two-thirds of the major food companies improved on their nutrition commitments since 2017. New Zealand's food environments are largely unhealthy and policy implementation is low. Where policies, codes and commitments by government and food industry do exist, the progress on implementing these is patchy and there are many remaining gaps. There is considerable scope for the government, food companies, and local setting to make major changes towards a healthier, more equitable food environment with food policy in the form of mandatory regulations required to ensure real progress.

**Keywords:** food environments; monitoring; nutrition policies



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