

For Immediate Release



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Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Ministry of Public Health and the Knowledge to Policy (K2P) Center at AUB: “Childhood obesity and overweight numbers are not individual cases anymore and schools are allies to end this phenomenon”

The rate of obesity among children in Lebanon is one of the highest in the region. In 2009, about 11% of schoolchildren in Lebanon were obese, and it is estimated that these figures are likely to continue to rise.

Childhood obesity and overweight cases are responsible for different short-term health, social and psychological consequences, and increase their risk of chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs), from high blood sugar levels to increased risk of exposure to various types of cancer. While NCDs are currently the leading cause of death in Lebanon, the childhood obesity epidemic afflicts children and parents early.

Many underlying factors cause an increase in childhood obesity and overweight rates, as such, multiple interventions are needed. However, the precautionary measures and policies taken and implemented by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Public Health, have been a successful start to reduce childhood obesity and overweight rates in Lebanon. Nonetheless, these policies were faced with multiple that require multisectoral action to overcome.

In this context, the Ministries of Education, Higher Education, and Public Health cooperated with K2P Center at the Faculty of Health Sciences at the American University of Beirut (AUB), to support all the efforts with high quality local and international scientific evidence, compiled by the K2P. K2P Center held a policy dialogue to Promote Effective School Policies for Childhood Overweight & Obesity Prevention in Lebanon on Thursday, March 7, 2019, at Gefinor Hotel, Beirut.

The K2P Dialogue brought together the main stakeholders, including the Director General of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Mr. Fadi Yarak, representatives of 6 other different ministries, local and international associations, researchers and specialists in the field and representatives of youth, parents and schools.

Dr. Fadi El Jardali, Director of K2P Center, launched the dialogue that was supported by the K2P Policy Brief, which collected the best available scientific evidence and provided suggestions for policy elements, taking into consideration the views of decision-makers, specialists, stakeholders, and citizens on the implementation considerations. The policy brief was circulated to all relevant decision-makers and stakeholders, prior to the dialogue, to enrich the conversation and make room for focused discussions.

Dr. Rima Nakkash, the Associate Director of K2P Center and facilitator of the dialogue said that this dialogue is unique to the work of the Center. It not only included the process of knowledge translation (from science into practice), but it supported this translation with an advocacy strategy, which included citizens' voices on the problem of childhood obesity and their views on the proposed solutions based on their diverse experiences in this field. She added: "It is the first time that the experiences and views of the concerned citizens have been conveyed to decision-makers in this way, to be around the same table among representatives of ministries, associations, and institutions concerned are a step of high value in policy dialogues. In fact, it encourages citizens to hold policy makers accountable and advocate for laws that benefit them. Also, for citizens to be part in the decision-making process in health-related policies is their basic right."

Additionally, the Director General of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Mr. Fadi Yarak, praised the methodology of K2P Center, which gives scientific evidence the authority to build the best health and social policies. He also supported the results of the dialogue and expressed the readiness of the Ministry to apply them, based on the scientific evidence and practical experience applied by various stakeholders. "The Ministry of Education and Higher Education needs the efforts of academic institutions, ministries, and international and local associations, to apply them comprehensively in private schools and technical as well as the public schools."

Moreover, Mrs. Pamela Mansour, Head of Mother and Child Department in the Ministry of Public Health, highlighted that "The Ministry of Public Health fully supports all the results of the dialogue and the steps taken based on the constructive discussions".

Participants discussed during the dialogue the proposed policy elements based on the scientific evidence mentioned in the policy brief:

Element 1: Controlling the Standards, Availability, Affordability, Accessibility, and Marketing of the Food and Drinks in the Canteens, Vending Machines, and School Cafeterias.

Element 2: Integrating Nutrition and Physical Activity Programs in the School Curricula and health education sessions.

At the end of the dialogue, stakeholders agreed on forming committees responsible for discussing the process of implementation, and a coalition to ensure the appropriate implementation of the programs and policies to cover all Lebanese schools.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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