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Rola Arab

RA Consulting, Belgium

Obesity prevention and control in the Middle East: Challenges and opportunities

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and particularly obesity is prevalent in the Middle East and have become an important public health issue and a major economic burden on the countries in the region. With the support of the World Health Organization (WHO), public health authorities are in the process of developing national nutrition strategies and implementing measures to prevent and control obesity at National and at regional level. Regulators in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are developing measures such as restrictions on the availability of unhealthy foods, health-awareness campaigns and the most recent actions underway are the reduction levels of sugar, salt and fat in food products, the introduction of taxes on fast foods and soft drinks and the development of food standards to limit trans-fat and salt content in food products. Despite these initiatives to prevent obesity, public health authorities in the Middle East countries still face many challenges due to the absence of a policy framework on health and nutrition and of institutional capacities to develop sustainable nutrition programs, in addition to surveillance gaps and the absence of recent data on obesity. Based on successful policies and strategies that were implemented at regional and global level to fight against obesity and putting an emphasis on childhood obesity, the presentation will assess what is the way forward to address and overcome these challenges.

Biography

Rola Arab is the Founder and Managing Director of RA Consulting and an Advisor on policies and regulations in the health and nutrition and food safety areas for Europe, Middle East and Africa. She has earned Bachelor's degree in Law from Saint Joseph University in Beirut, Lebanon and Master's degree in European Affairs from the College of Europe in Warsaw, Poland. She has participated in many speaking events on health and nutrition and she collaborates on a regular basis on regulatory projects and training programs with public health authorities such as the GCC Standardization Organization and the Ministry of Health of Saudi Arabia.

rola.arab@raconsulting.co

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