

# **PROMOTING WATER CONSUMPTION THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE: THE WAY FORWARD**

*(Organised by the Ministry of Health - 3 September 2019)*

## **BACKGROUND**

Around 70% of Maltese adults and 40% of children are overweight or obese. Sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) have been linked to overweight and obesity, the development of Type 2 diabetes as well as dental caries. Substituting water for SSBs and promoting water intake - such as through making free potable drinking water (e.g. through water fountains) prominently and widely accessible in public facilities - is a key strategy to prevent obesity and associated negative health consequences.

Substantial work is already being carried out to improve access to drinking water in Maltese schools, but no measures are being implemented at the neighbourhood and locality level. The installation of water fountains in public open spaces (e.g. playgrounds), communal spaces such as sports grounds, village squares etc., and public buildings (e.g. local council and government offices), would increase access to free, safe drinking water and encourage substitution for SSBs.

## **OBJECTIVES**

To promote discussion of how water consumption can be increased through improving access to and availability of safe drinking water at the neighbourhood or locality level. To examine each organization/institution's potential contribution towards the main objective within a collaborative, intersectoral framework, and establish next steps to address the issue.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND MAIN ACTION POINTS**

Participants agreed to set up a working group to promote water consumption in Malta and increase availability/accessibility of potable water in public places through the installation of water dispensers. It would be necessary to liaise with stakeholders across sectors and take a collaborative approach.

### **Main Action Points:**

- Promote increased water consumption in Malta by facilitating accessibility to potable water dispensers in different localities, using key indicators such as water consumption, plastic bottles saved, CO2 saved through reductions in transportation traffic (i.e. less need for distribution of bottled water) and anonymised user data (e.g. level of use by people of different SE groups).
- Engage with the Water Services Corporation, the Planning Authority and Local Councils to promote water consumption through environmental change at community level.
- Ensure that vulnerable groups are not 'left behind' or disadvantaged in their access to water and adopt a social determinants of health approach to ensure equitable access to water dispensers. This could be achieved through a set-up of local mechanisms with resident associations and local councils to obtain feedback from residents of localities where water dispensers will be installed.