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UNICEF EDUCATION

Education, Health and Nutrition Case Study

ARGENTINA

Improving child and adolescent health and nutrition through policy advocacy

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[Malnutrition](#) poses persistent challenges to child and adolescent health in Argentina. In 2019, the upward trend in childhood overweight and obesity figures continued with [41 per cent of children aged 5–10 overweight or obese](#). [National surveys](#) show that 4 out of 10 school-aged children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 17 who purchased food and/or drink in schools bought sugary beverages, and [6 out of 10 children and adolescents](#) bought sweets in the school kiosk. Compounding this situation is the scant food and nutrition education that children and adolescents receive at school or in other settings, which curtails their right to information that will aid them to make healthy choices for themselves.

Following [further research and analysis](#) and considering [lessons learned in the region](#), UNICEF Argentina identified that one of the key enablers to ensuring knowledge and access to nutritious food and improving healthy eating behaviours was through the adoption of the [Front of Packaging \(FOP\) labelling legislation](#).

An FOP labelling law standard establishes the inclusion of black octagons with white borders and letters that provide warnings about excess sugars, total fats, saturated fats, sodium and calories. In addition, the standard includes two legends: “contains sweeteners not recommended for children” and “contains caffeine, avoid in children.” FOP legislation, in the case of Argentina, also involves the mandatory inclusion of food and nutrition education in schools, and the prohibition of marketing, promotion and sponsorship aimed at children of products that contain warnings on the front-of-packages. Moreover, products carrying warning labels cannot contain children’s characters or toys or promote health properties such as “contains vitamins” and “rich in fibre.”

Toward this end, UNICEF Argentina concentrated advocacy efforts to support the adoption of FOP warning labels and accompanying policy changes to enshrine in law the provision of appropriate information on nutrition to children, regulation of marketing targeting children and adolescents and support healthy eating behaviours.

To make the case for the adoption of the FOP law, UNICEF Argentina [generated evidence](#) to support FOP labelling, targeting civil society, education partners and parliamentarians through bilateral advocacy and coalitions, such as the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Simultaneously, UNICEF Argentina provided technical support to strengthen the organisational and coordination capacity of the National Coalition to Prevent Obesity in Children and Adolescents, bringing together more than 50 civil society organizations that actively advocated for FOP law. Due to UNICEF Argentina's sweeping advocacy efforts, the Government adopted the FOP law in October 2021.

RESULTS

- The adoption of the FOP law in Argentina was monumental. In schools, the law prohibits the sale and distribution of food with warning labels and supports nutrition and health promotion in educational settings. As a result of UNICEF's leading role in generating evidence and convening partners in support of the law, the Ministry of Health asked UNICEF to join the FOP law working group to further develop and monitor the implementation of the law.
- At the provincial level (Jujuy and Santa Fe), UNICEF is monitoring and supporting school reforms in alignment with the law, through the redesign of school canteen menus and the implementation of compulsory health and nutrition education in educational institutions.
- At the municipal level, UNICEF supports the continued advocacy and implementation of the law to ensure the promotion of healthy environments for children and adolescents in schools at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels and care centres, in addition to other spaces where teaching, care, development and socialisation occur, such as sports and recreational spaces.
- In 2022, UNICEF developed training for technical teams from 20 municipalities in 5

provinces in healthy school environments, in accordance with the new FOP law. This training included guidance on the supply of healthy foods within schools and other institutions and improved access to safe drinking water.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Policy advocacy is key to ensuring a sustainable, enabling environment for health and nutrition promotion in schools.** Generating evidence to support legislative and policy reforms, paired with coalition building and bilateral partnerships, were critical in maintaining political pressure and influence for the adoption of the FOP law.
- **Internal and external engagement needs to go hand in hand: UNICEF created an internal task force with colleagues from health, communication and private sector engagement.** UNICEF also strengthened external strategic alliances with UN partners (PAHO, FAO and the Resident Coordinator's Office), academic institutions and civil society.
- **Mobilising influencers and implementing awareness campaigns targeting school aged children, adolescents and parents are crucial to move the needle on healthy eating.** Ultimately, the FOP law was a foundational step in advancing healthy eating behaviours for children and adolescents, in school environments and beyond.

NEXT STEPS

While sustained advocacy efforts successfully contributed to the adoption of key laws and policies to ensure better access to health and nutrition education for children and adolescents in Argentina, the next step is to leverage this to deliver awareness raising campaigns and education on healthy eating through the education sector. In the coming year, UNICEF Argentina will continue to expand its support to provinces to ensure relevant policies are adopted and implemented in alignment with the new law.

Cost effectiveness: In 2021, UNICEF Argentina invested approximately US \$115,000 in school-based health and nutrition interventions, benefitting 8.7 million well-nourished, healthy, and educated school children.

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