



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **New Initiative to Tackle Child Obesity**

A new health awareness programme designed for children, known as 'CHAMP', (Children, Healthy and Active! Multiagency Programme), will be launched at the Piazza on Saturday April 7th 2018, at 10am, by the Gibraltar Health Authority. CHAMP is a local initiative that intends to tackle child obesity, which has doubled in Gibraltar in recent years.

CHAMP started as a small steering group of professionals working together for the common cause of helping children and their families live healthy and active lives. The group of 'CHAMPions' has been growing, with members from various Government Departments, including the Gibraltar Health Authority, Public Health, Education, the Care Agency, Sports and Culture, all contributing. CHAMP seeks to create an informative, pragmatic and supportive environment in which children and families are empowered and encouraged to make appropriate choices toward healthy living.

According to the World Health Organisation, poor weight management in childhood is one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21 century. Based on current trends, half of all children in the UK will be obese or overweight by 2020 and half of all men and women could be obese by 2030.

Dr Vijay Kuman, Director of Public Health, explained that this was a long standing problem in Gibraltar, noting that the GHA's dietetics department had carried out a survey of Gibraltar's schoolchildren in the late 1990s and found that over a third of them were overweight or obese, an incidence that was higher than that of UK and other comparable nations at the time.

Dr Kumar said: "Children are very dependent on their parents, families, teachers, the media and the wider society to guide them through the pitfalls of modern life. However, the quality of what they receive may not be optimal, as the older generations themselves struggle to adapt to a fast-changing world. There is no doubt that poor child health is a nation-wide problem, not just that of individuals."

Dr Annie Dai, GHA Consultant Paediatrician, said that unhealthy lifestyles leading to poor weight management have a significant impact on modern families and societies in today's world, adding: "This does not only affect personal health, but influences a nation's economic growth and social cohesion, that leads to happy, progressive communities."

Ministry of Health, Care and Justice

HM Government of Gibraltar • Zone 1, Level 7 St Bernard's Hospital, Harbour Views Road • Gibraltar GX11 1AA

t +350 20007011 (Centrex 2027) f +350 20059942 e [ministry@gha.gi](mailto:ministry@gha.gi) w [gibraltar.gov.gi](http://gibraltar.gov.gi)



Minister for Health, Care and Justice, the Honourable Neil F. Costa MP spoke of the programme: “Child obesity is, of course, a matter of great concern for our community. I was very enthusiastic when Dr Dai briefed me on the work being conducted by ‘CHAMP’, and believe that a multiagency approach to tackle such an important issue, is the right one. It is essential that this is addressed in a positive and engaging manner, in order to encourage our children and their parents to make the right lifestyle choices to lead healthier lives.”