

Fighting the flab

Rising prosperity has brought with it the challenge of childhood obesity, but China has set ambitious goals to address the problem

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Childhood obesity is one of the fastest-growing health concerns in China.

With more than 15 million kids over 7 years of age classified as obese, the country now has the highest childhood obesity rates in the world. And the government is taking steps to slow the rate of incidence.

Late last year, the State Council, China's cabinet, announced the introduction of its Healthy China 2030 initiative. It aims to improve health and tackle obesity by promoting healthy lifestyles.

"China has recognized the problem, especially among children and adolescents," said Mu Li, professor of International Public Health at the University of Sydney.

One of the leaders in the public health field, she has been a visiting fellow at Peking University Health Science Center and the Institute of Food, Nutrition and Health, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich, Switzerland.

The issue of obesity is "not just for the government to

solve but one in which society as a whole has a responsibility", Li told *China Daily Asia Weekly*.

The Healthy China 2030 program is central to the government's agenda for health and development and a strategy that is being closely watched by many foreign countries, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

It is an issue that has not escaped the attention of President Xi Jinping, who has put health at the center of the country's entire policymaking machinery.

"Health has now become a key component in all areas of government and government policy," Li said.

By promoting healthier lifestyles through health and nutrition education campaigns and programs to improve physical fitness, the government hopes to lift the overall health of the nation and tackle obesity, said a spokesperson for the WHO in Beijing.

The government has set some ambitious goals in its program. It hopes by 2025 that more than 500 million people will be exercising regularly and the smoking rate among people over 15 years of age will be held at 20 percent. China still has one of the highest rates of smoking in the world.

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