

**HALEON**

# Meaningful access to Vitamin and Mineral Supplements

Our Haleon position



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## **Background**

It can be difficult for people to achieve a diet that provides them with adequate levels of all the micronutrients which are necessary to support their everyday health. Vitamin and Mineral Supplements (VMS) therefore play an important role in supporting people's health and wellness, and in doing so, bring value to healthcare systems. VMS products can empower people to own their health and wellness by providing a convenient and simple way to bridge the gap.<sup>i,ii,iii,iv,v,vi</sup> As such, vitamin and mineral supplements can be a cost-effective way to reduce the burden on healthcare systems by avoiding direct costs like hospital visits, and further indirect economic costs, such as a loss of productivity. We support measures which ensure consumers have meaningful access to VMS products.

## **Inadequate intake of vitamins and minerals**

Many peoples' diets do not provide them with adequate levels of vitamins and minerals. Globally, an estimated 2bn people have micronutrient inadequacies<sup>1</sup>, including in the developed world, where people increasingly consume nutrient-poor food.<sup>vii</sup> In the US, nearly a quarter of the population is at risk of being deficient in at least one vitamin.<sup>viii</sup> People who have an inadequacy are at risk of deficiency disease, with people who do not use dietary supplements at highest risk.<sup>ix</sup>

An inadequate intake of micronutrients, including vitamins D and A, Zinc and Omega-3, can affect several functions in the immune system, thereby reducing resistance to infections and increasing the severity of symptoms.<sup>x</sup> It has also been linked to an increased risk of chronic disease, including certain cancers.<sup>xi xii</sup>

Key at-risk populations include: pregnant women, who often have inadequacies in folic acid, iron, iodine and vitamins B, D and E; older adults, who have increased requirements for vitamin D and calcium; and people following certain diets, such as vegan or vegetarian, which can have nutritional shortfalls.<sup>xiii xiv xv</sup>

Studies have shown that use of multi-vitamin and -mineral supplements is associated with decreased micronutrient inadequacies, and a lower risk of

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1 Deficiencies in the vitamins and minerals needed by the body in small amounts to perform essential functions including enabling the body to produce enzymes, hormones and other substances needed for normal growth and development. Micronutrient deficiencies can cause visible and dangerous health conditions, but they can also lead to reductions in energy level, mental clarity, and overall capacity. [WHO, Micronutrients (who.int)]

deficiency.<sup>xvi</sup> Daily multi-vitamin and -mineral supplement use effectively closes most dietary micronutrient gaps.<sup>xvii</sup>

## **Supplementing diets with VMS products can result in savings for healthcare systems**

As well as benefiting individual health and wellness, use of VMS products can lead to savings for healthcare systems, and further economic savings by avoiding the loss of productivity associated with many health conditions.

In the European Union countries, studies have shown that omega-3 fatty acids supplementation could result in significant savings. If all adults over 55 took omega-3, the subsequent reduced risk of having cardiovascular disease (CVD) could save €64.6bn and 1.5m hospital visits could be avoided over 5 years. <sup>xviii</sup>

Estimates suggest that for every \$1 (AUD) spent on vitamin D and calcium supplements for Australian women over 50, over \$20 would be saved due to avoided medical costs and productivity loss from osteoporosis. This equates to an average annual saving of \$1.8bn. <sup>xviii</sup>

## **Meaningful access to VMS products**

Consumer interest in VMS products is growing, as people increasingly look for ways to support their health and wellness – a trend which has been accelerated by COVID-19. <sup>xix xx</sup>

To realise the potential individual health benefits and healthcare system savings, consumers should have meaningful access to vitamin and mineral supplements. This means more than ensuring consumers can find VMS products in stores or online. It means consumers should:

- Have access to VMS products which meet their needs, now and in the future, as innovation brings new products to consumers;
- Be confident that the VMS products they take are safe, clearly labelled, and that the benefits they claim to have are supported by scientific evidence; and
- Be supported to understand how good quality VMS products can contribute to their everyday health and wellness, to empower them to own their health.

In this context it is important to note that, in line with our Human Rights Statement, it may be necessary to cease to trade in countries when required to by law or where it becomes impossible to act in accordance with our own values.

*For more information, please see our **position on human rights**.*

## **Policy recommendations**

Achieving meaningful access to vitamins and mineral supplements is a cost-effective way to unlock significant value for both individuals and healthcare systems. To realise these opportunities, we believe that governments, policymakers, health systems, regulators, industry, trade associations, HCPs, and citizens should work together to:

- Increase consumer education about the benefits and uses of vitamin and mineral supplements;
- Help build trust in VMS products by enforcing adherence by manufacturers to high standards of quality, safety, and scientific evidence; and
- Minimise barriers to innovation so consumers can access vitamin and mineral supplements which meet their needs now and in the future.

*For more information on how we engage policymakers, please see our **position on political advocacy**.*

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