22% fewer overweight children in nursery schools in Belgium thanks to the VIASANO programme

Brussels, 14 June 2012 – The issue of obesity and overweight is a difficult reality to counter throughout the entire world including Europe. Achieving a significant decrease in the prevalence of this health condition is a hard feat. Based on the EPODE Methodology, VIASANO, applied in Belgium, consists of acting in the heart of the towns by motivating the different players surrounding families to spread a simple, targeted health message and implement actions involving whole the community. And the facts speak for themselves, according to the first results, it works for the Belgian population as well as the French one!

Positive assessment of the prevalence of obesity and overweight in the pilot towns

Two pilot towns decided to launch the VIASANO programme in their territories, in 2007 and 2008 respectively. Today the first results of the VIASANO project for these two towns have been announced, and they are truly promising.

During the school year 2007/2008, 1,300 children in year 1 and 3 of nursery schools were weighed and measured by the School Health Prevention Services (Prévention de la Santé à l’Ecole, PSE), as well as another 1,484 children in 2009/2010. The data were collected by the schools’ health services and analysed by the statistics department of the Free University of Brussels (Université Libre de Bruxelles – ULB).
A 22% significant decrease (p< 0.05) was noted in the prevalence of overweight in nursery school children, which decreased from 9.46% to 7.41%. In that same period, in the control towns, the prevalence of overweight did not decrease. It even slightly increased, from 9.53% to 9.58%\(^1\) (NS).

Obesity and overweight in Belgian children: a true public health issue!

Parallel to the evolution in the prevalence of overweight and obesity in the pilot towns, the towns which joined the programme in 2009/2010, after the pilot phase, have reached point zero.

According to the data for 2009/2010 of the School Health Prevention Services, 15.5% of children in year 1 of nursery school and 24.2% of children in year 6 are overweight or obese. That equals one child in four in the last year of primary school.
In the VIASANO towns the prevalence of obesity and overweight is one child in five in year 1 of nursery school in certain towns, and one child in four in year 6 of primary school.

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\(^1\) Flemish curves (Cut of used: 85th centile)
The prevalence of children who are overweight or obese is increasing in all towns between year 1 of nursery school and year 6 of primary school. In certain towns, the number even doubles. This data presented in the VIASANO towns makes politicians even more aware of the importance of a healthy weight from a young age.

VIASANO: a national, European and international approach

Currently VIASANO is running in 16 towns. Its aim is to spread even further. VIASANO is based on the EPODE®, methodology which is recognised to be effective by DG SANCO\(^2\) and is the focus of a recent article published in *Obesity Reviews*\(^2\). VIASANO, such as 20 prevention programmes from all over the world, joined the international not-for-profit association EPODE International Network (EIN) based in Brussels. Professor Jan Vinck, psychologist, member of the VIASANO Expert Committee and of the EIN Board of Directors, explains why he supports VIASANO: “*I support the VIASANO programme and its methodology mainly because it is based on the idea that commitment and the will to act should be the main priority of local politicians. In fact, they can influence and change the daily environment, which, in turn, can change the behaviour of citizens. In this framework, it is also those politicians who should organise the collaboration between the participating local partners/actors.*”

The EPODE International Network (EIN) is the world’s largest obesity prevention network. It is an international non-profit organisation based in Brussels. The EIN Board of Directors is composed of experts from both scientific and policy communities, and is chaired by Dr. Armando Barriguete. The EIN also relies on a Scientific Advisory Board gathering high-level experts from key international public health institutions. Two global founding partners support the EIN and its activities: The Coca-Cola Company and Nestlé. For more information, please visit the website: [www.epode-international-network.com](http://www.epode-international-network.com) and follow EIN on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/#/Epode_Network](https://twitter.com/#/Epode_Network).

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