

# Action on salt in China

Luke Allen

He and colleagues (July 7, 2018, p 7)<sup>1</sup> argue that it is best to start with voluntary salt reduction targets for industry while regulation and legislation are enacted on the basis that complex legislative processes can delay action. It is important to clarify that the legislative process should start before any invitation to voluntary reformulation is extended. Although voluntary industry targets have undoubtedly worked well in the UK,<sup>2</sup> ensuring that industry-led initiatives do not postpone effective legislation is crucial. Canada's experience with industrially produced trans-fatty acids provides a cautionary tale. In 2007, the Canadian Minister of Health set voluntary industry targets alongside an ultimatum that legislation would be introduced if the targets were not met within 2 years. Heavy lobbying has postponed legislation for more than a decade.<sup>3</sup> There is nothing to stop China and other low-income and middle-income countries from taking immediate action to introduce binding legislation while providing a grace period for companies to adjust and reformulate. Decades of global experience with tobacco, alcohol, and other dietary vectors of non-communicable diseases have taught us that industry is much more likely to delay effective action than state legislative processes. I declare no competing interests.

1 He FJ, Zhang P, Li Y, MacGregor GA. Action on Salt China. *Lancet* 2018; 392: 7–9.

2 Tedstone AE. Repeating the success of the salt reduction programme. *BMJ* 2016; 355: i6079.

3 L'Abbé MR, Lewis J, Zehaluk C. The potential of the Codex Alimentarius to promote healthy diets worldwide—the Canadian Experience of implementation. In: Hawkes C, Blouin C, Henson S, Drager N, Dube L, eds. *Trade, food, diet and health: perspectives and policy options*. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2010: 238–63.