

## President launches innovative Food App



His Excellency, the President of Fiji, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote (left) scans a supermarket item as Dean CMNHS, Dr William May looks on.

His Excellency, the President of Fiji, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote, today launched the FoodSwitch Fiji app, a mobile-based application, that allows phones to scan barcodes on food products and provide easy to understand nutrition information and suggestions for healthier alternatives.

The FoodSwitch project, supported by the Pacific Research Centre of the Prevention of Obesity and Non-Communicable Diseases under the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS) at the Fiji National University (FNU), was led by The George Institute for Global Health, and funded by Australia's Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade through its innovation Xchange programme.

In launching the app, Hon Konrote said: "I commend Fiji National University and The George Institute for Global Health Australia for developing the FoodSwitch project in Fiji".

national questions.

"This app and the data behind it will contribute in our quest to find solutions to the issues of Non-Communicable Diseases that affect our communities," he added.

Meanwhile, Professor Bruce Neal, Executive Director of The George Institute for Global Health Australia, said that food labels could be hard (for consumers) to understand.

"FoodSwitch makes it easier for shoppers by providing simple nutrition information, and suggesting healthier alternatives."

"Unhealthy diets are the leading cause of death and disability around the world and rapidly rising rates of obesity are being fueled by the abundance of packaged foods high in sugar, salt and fat on our supermarket shelves," Professor Neal highlighted.

"FoodSwitch will not only help Fijians to make healthier choices when shopping at the supermarket, it can also help encourage the food industry to start making healthier foods."



His Excellency, the President of Fiji, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote (middle), with Dean CMNHS, Dr William May (3rd right), Project Lead, Clare Farrand (2nd right), Acting Permanent Secretary MOHMS, Susan Kiran (closer to camera) and other stakeholders during the launch.

"The FoodSwitch app allows you to look at items in stores and see what healthier items to choose."

"I think we all know that eating well is important for our health and wellbeing, but knowing what to eat and how to choose healthier options is not always that easy."

The President said, they were fortunate in Fiji to have a wide choice of both local and imported foods widely available to choose from.

"The team at the Ministry of Health, works in partnerships with other ministries and groups to ensure teaching about healthy eating starts right from school and continues through to communities."

"However, from today Fijians will have access to a new tool to help them with choosing a healthier diet," Hon Konrote said.

Dean CMNHS, Dr William May, added that the FoodSwitch Fiji app will also inform policy direction and would enable consumers to make healthier food choices.

According to Dr May, the College through its research centres, supported projects which provided answers to

The FoodSwitch Fiji app is a technology-based system designed to capture and analyse data on Fiji's food supply and create outputs to help facilitate system-wide changes.

It has details on approximately 6000 packaged food and beverage products collected from five major supermarkets in Fiji.

Consumers can use the app to scan the bar codes of food and beverage products in any store and receive immediate, easy-to-understand nutrition information about the product as well as a list of similar foods that are healthier choices. Fijians can also contribute to data collection by capturing items not currently in FoodSwitch using the 'Help us out' function.

Project Lead for FoodSwitch Fiji, Clare Farrand, also a Senior Public Health Nutritionist said: "We're delighted to partner with FNU to make the FoodSwitch app available in Fiji and look forward to continuing to support a healthier food environment for all Fijians".



(L-R) Project Lead, Clare Farrand, His Excellency, the President of Fiji, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote, Dean CMNHS, Dr William May, Associate Dean-Research, Dr Donald Wilson with students.