

STUDY GRANT

Location key to healthy lifestyle

TAX breaks for grocers selling fresh fruit and vegetables, and tax rises for fast food should be imposed to make people healthier, an Adelaide health expert says.

UniSA research chairman in social epidemiology Professor Mark Daniel has won a \$290,000 National Health and Medical Research Council grant to study how where you live - such as proximity to junk food and healthy food outlets - affects you.

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Fat tax to curb growing waistlines

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SA Health has also awarded him \$265,000 over three years for his work. His research will use data gathered through the North West Adelaide Health Study over the past decade.

Professor Daniel will examine how people's habitats affect their chances of developing metabolic syndrome - a cluster of high-risk conditions such as hypertension and high waist girth.

Up to seven in 10 people with metabolic syndrome will go on to develop chronic illnesses such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Professor Daniel said he conducts his research with the aim of influencing policy decisions on taxation, urban planning and public transport.



say that's taking it too far, but the fundamental premise of health promotion is voluntary change and if people can't change voluntarily you legislate," he said.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Preventative Health Taskforce has recommended tax reforms to make healthy options easier, and unhealthy options harder.

Taskforce member and UniSA's Foundation Chair in Health Economics Professor Leonie Segal said their recommendations look at individual food items rather than store type.



POLL: Should fast food be subject to a health tax?

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"You can tax the fast-food companies and reduce the tax on grocers or places that are selling healthful food," he said.

"We might be able to promote fewer cul de sac developments and more grid sections which encourage physical activity. We might be able to enact bylaws against fast-food restaurants opening in new residential locations. We want to see more green space," Professor Daniel said.

He moved here from Montreal, Canada, in part to take advantage of the "goldmine" of data collected by the NWAH study.

He is working with SA Health, local governments and community groups on the project.

Professor Daniel said there were various tax strategies that could make healthy choices more inviting.

"Some people might

She said the theory of changing the taxation system to "modify people's decisions" was quite simple. "People do respond to price signals and once it's set up it can roll out reasonably simply," she said.

Professor Segal said the taskforce would recommend increasing the tax on "energy-dense, nutrient-poor" foods and reducing the price of healthy foods.

Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon said the Federal Government was considering all the recommendations of the taskforce, including tax reform. "The Rudd Government is serious about preventive health because we know prevention is better than cure," she said.

A Heart Foundation SA spokesman said the foundation was supportive of the Federal Government's review.