A comparative analysis of the proportion of commonly consumed packaged foods meeting regional sodium targets in four Latin American countries between 2015 and 2018

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Hypertension is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease and stroke. In many Latin American countries (LAC), one-third of adults have hypertension, largely due to excess dietary sodium. Therefore, sodium reduction targets for LAC for eighteen commonly consumed packaged food categories were developed in 2015 by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and endorsed by the multi-sectorial Salt Smart Consortium. Objective: To determine if a significantly greater proportion of packaged foods from four LAC (Argentina, Costa Rica, Paraguay and Peru) meet the PAHO regional targets in 2018, compared to 2015. Methods: This analysis utilized two cross-sectional food label datasets collected in 2015-2016 (n=3,859) and 2017-2018 (n=5,663). The sodium content in foods was obtained from the nutrient declarations on food packages in mg/serving and were standardized to mg/100 g or ml. Proportions of products meeting targets were calculated. Chi-square tested for differences in proportions between years. Results: Compliance with regional targets significantly increased from 83% (n=3,198/3,859) to 86% (4,894/5,663), respectively for 2015-2016 and 2017-2018 (p<0.001). At the category level, four food categories had a significantly higher proportion of foods meeting regional targets from 2015-2016 to 2017-2018: Bread products from 78% (n=273/350) to 92% (n=287/311, p<0.001), cakes from 63% (n=197/312) to 78% (n=181/230, p<0.001), breaded meat and poultry from 61% (n=44/72) to 87% (n=67/77, p<0.001) and wet and dry soups from 62% (n=136/217) to 79% (n=120/152, p<0.001). However, two categories had a significantly lower number of foods meeting the targets over time: Cookies
decreased from 94% (n=408/432, p<0.001) to 87% (n=328/378), and meats and sausages from 87% (n=328/378) to 80% (n=285/357, p=0.01). The other fourteen categories did not significantly change. Conclusions: Only 4 of 18 food categories had a higher proportion of foods meeting the PAHO regional sodium targets, while two categories had fewer foods meeting the targets, over time. Since a high proportion of foods were already meeting the targets at baseline and sodium intakes in LAC remain unacceptably high, more stringent sodium targets are required to support further sodium reductions in packaged foods in LAC. Funding: CIHR Scholarships, Department of Nutritional Sciences Graduate Fellowship, Project IDRC-108167, PAHO.