

## INAUGURAL APPG FOR 'MICRONUTRIENTS AND HEALTH' MEETING HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF NUTRITION BEFORE AND DURING PREGNANCY

As one of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary legacy initiatives, the Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) has supported the foundation of a new All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), which held its first meeting on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> March in the House of Commons.

The 'Micronutrients and Health' group, chaired by Rosie Cooper MP, aims to promote awareness and understanding, and to help form strategies in Parliament, of the vital role of micronutrients in helping people to be healthier. Within this, the group will discuss the importance of nutritional food supplements, which are now taken by over 25 million consumers every week, 60% of them on a daily basis.

Whilst there are currently a number of APPGs in Westminster looking at health issues, there are none that specifically focus on micronutrients and food supplements so this group will be the first of its kind. The new APPG is supported by vice-chairs Sir David Amess MP, Dawn Butler MP, Gavin Robinson MP and Derek Thomas MP, and will meet four times a year to discuss a different policy topic which will be of interest both to policy makers and industry, relating to the role of micronutrients in the various life stages of consumers.

The first meeting focused on '*Nutrition before and during pregnancy: ensuring that mother and child stay healthy*', with Rosie Cooper observing that this issue is very topical in Westminster at the moment. Given the interest in the ongoing debate about the mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid, and she hoped that the meeting would provide additional insight and perspective to that discussion.

Informative and thought-provoking presentations were provided by consultant nutritionist Dr Michele Sadler, and Martine Austin, Programme Manager for Global Prevention at the International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, who both discussed the huge impact of neural tube defects (NTDs) on the lives of families and the importance of pre-pregnancy nutrition in preventing these.

Michele Sadler highlighted that the take-up of supplements by women of child-bearing age was extremely low, and suggested that encouraging children to learn about food and nutrition at an early age is vital in the task of ongoing public education on the issue.

Martine Austin warned that the emotional impact, as well as the health impact of NTDs on families could be devastating. Martine also pointed out that there is currently no national strategy on NTD prevention, and a distinct lack of public information on this area of nutrition, arguing that the politics around this situation may be eclipsing the issues at hand, saying "*This issue is something that I'm extremely passionate about, and I am hugely frustrated that women's awareness on this issue is no greater now than it was 20 years ago. If I could see one promise from this government it would be a commitment for a strategy to prevent neural tube defects.*"

A number of key action steps were agreed and Rosie Cooper MP commented "*It was clear from our discussions that there needed to be a targeted public health campaign which emphasised to appropriate groups the need to take folic acid rather than simply adding folic acid to bread. I fully understand the strong arguments for this, and appreciated offers of support from those present at the meeting, but would now much prefer to see real action rather than just words.*"

For more information on the All Party Parliamentary Group for Micronutrients and Health please contact [appg@hfma.co.uk](mailto:appg@hfma.co.uk)

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**The HFMA**

The Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) is the voice of the UK's natural health industry and represents more than 125 manufacturers and suppliers of natural health products.

Founded in 1965, the HFMA is a not-for-profit organisation which operates long-standing codes of practice to ensure that member companies adhere to high standards and offer good quality, safe products supported by responsible, lawful information.

For further information about the HFMA, visit [www.hfma.co.uk](http://www.hfma.co.uk).



Dr Michele Sadler addressing the meeting



Pictured left to right: guest speakers Martine Austin and Dr Michele Sadler, Rosie Cooper MP (Chair) and vice-chairs Dawn Butler MP and Derek Thomas MP