

Fighting Micronutrient Deficiencies

In February, Russian Federation Minister of Health Tatyana Dmitrieva and US Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala signed a joint statement agreeing to work together to eliminate micronutrient malnutrition. The statement proposes possible activities to improve micronutrient fortification and education, including developing a training course for Russian scientists, doctors, public health and policy officials and industry leaders; carrying out nutritional and food market surveys to determine the magnitude of the problem; developing a Russian micronutrient laboratory to assist local governments in monitoring micronutrient levels and public information campaigns. The declaration was shaped during a two-day meeting on micronutrient malnutrition sponsored by the US Centers for Disease Control and attended by more than 60 US and Russian health officials and private voluntary groups, including AIHA.

That agreement was just latest in a growing number of programs working to improve intake of a variety of micronutrients, both in the NIS and around the world. AIHA's Tbilisi, Georgia-Atlanta, Georgia partnership, for example, will sponsor a team from Emory University and the Center for Disease Control this spring to help assess iodine deficiency and implement changes in the Republic of Georgia. Sister Cities International is currently launching a micronutrient campaign aimed at educating governments and residents in the partnerships it has formed between cities in 123 countries. NIS campaigns include ones in Dubna, Russia-LaCrosse, Wisconsin and Tbilisi-Atlanta. The Micronutrient Initiative, in Ottawa, Canada, compiles a database of country-by-country statistics on micronutrients, convenes conferences and works to build alliances of government and public health workers to combat malnutrition.

UNICEF and WHO also have extensive programs aimed at reducing micronutrient malnutrition worldwide. UNICEF's 1990 World Summit for Children sets goals of virtually eliminating deficiencies of Vitamin A, iodine and iron by the year 2000. UNICEF advocates fortification and supplement programs to ensure adequate intake of these nutrients.

Governments of several NIS countries have taken strides to mandate fortification of foods with iodine. Georgia and Turkmenistan have laws, while legislation is pending in Ukraine and Kazakhstan.