FOR THE RECORD

Salt down under

In Canada, broadcasters would declare it a national crisis. Such is the apoplectic state that has ensued in Australia after a national preventative health task force floated the proposition that Vegemite — a paste comprised of brewer's yeast, salt and other additives that is typically spread on toast — be banned as part of a bid to reduce national salt intake.

Even acting Prime Minister Julia Gillard weighed in, telling reporters that Vegemite would retain its place on breakfast tables as long as she has any kind of influence. "Vegemite is part of being Australian, part of our history, part of our future — and I'll be continuing to wake up in the morning and having it on my toast."

Said to be immune to spoilage because of its high salt content (8%–10%), Vegemite is a milder version of the British staple Marmite.

Australia's National Preventative Health Taskforce was charged with developing strategies to improve health and combat obesity, which is estimated to

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The Australian division of World Action on Salt and Health estimates that, on average, Australian adults consume 9000 mg of salt daily. A 2004 Statistics Canada study indicated average Canadian intake was 3092 mg. The US Institute of Medicine recommends a maximum intake of 2300 mg.

have cost the national health system A\$8.3 billion (Can\$6.9 billion) in 2008.

The task force issued a draft report last year proposing a national strategy aimed at making Australia the world's healthiest nation by 2020 (www.preventativehealth.org.au).

Targets included a reversal of obesity trends, a reduction in the preva-

lence of daily smoking to less than 9%, a 30% decrease in alcohol consumption, and measures aimed at eliminating the 17-year life expectancy gap between indigenous and nonindigenous peoples. The taskforce's final report is due in June. — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

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Briefly

Drug network: Federal Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq says the government will pump \$31 million over 4 years into ongoing development of a national Drug Safety and Effectiveness Network that aims to link researchers into a new virtual network and coordinate a national research strategy regarding the safety and effectiveness of pharmaceuticals in the marketplace. Having earlier shelled out \$1 million for the initiative, the government has now committed \$32 million and vows to fund the venture at an annual \$10 million level once it becomes fully operational in 5 years.

Isotope production: The United States National Academy of Sciences says it is feasible to eliminate the use of highly enriched uranium in medical isotope production and shift to production methods that use low enriched ura-

nium. But the move will require more R&D and "tens of millions of dollars" in new investment, the academy adds in its report (www.nap.edu). Such an approach may promote domestic isotope production, a development urged late last year by the highly respected *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* (www.the-bulletin.org). US calls for domestic isotope production have escalated as a result of the extended outage of Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd.'s National Research Universal reactor in late 2007, (*CMAJ* 2008;178[5]:536-8 and *CMAJ* 2008;178[6]:668).

Lung transplants: The rate of lung transplants in Canada rose more than 3 times faster than that of solid organ transplants over a 10-year period ending in 2006, according to a report by the Canadian Institute of Health Information (www.cihi.ca). Lung transplants increased by more than 84% from 1997

to 2006, as compared to 29% for solid organs. That was primarily a function of advances in treatment since the world's first successful lung transplant was performed in Canada in 1983. Between 1997 and 2006, the 3-year survival rate for lung transplant recipients rose to 80% from 60%, but demand for lung transplants — 252 people in 2006, compared with 119 in 1997 — has lengthened wait times, while nearly 300 people died awaiting transplants.

Fit notes: The Department for Work and Pensions has announced that paper-based "sick notes" will be replaced in the United Kingdom in 2010 with electronic "fit notes" in a bid to keep people with disabilities or long-term medical conditions working rather than on extended sick leave. Instead of filling out notes for sick leave, which Work and Pensions Secretary James Purnell estimated costs the British economy