

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### A new era for local rugby: Kicking sugar to touch

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In a first for NZ rugby, Nelson Marlborough Health (NMH) has sponsored Tasman Rugby Union (TRU) teams, replacing the TRU's former agreement with Coca Cola/Powerade, to become the union's official health and wellbeing partner.

The three-year agreement will see Mako players promote health initiatives, and the TRU encourage positive health-related decisions and behaviour among its stadium audiences, club rugby communities and schools. The focus for the year will be on:

- the reduction of sugar consumption through the NMH Tap into Water campaign, and the non-renewal of the union's sponsorship with Coca Cola/Powerade. Junior club rugby players are one of the main intended audiences for this promotional work.
- the promotion of SmokeFree environments
- the promotion of alcohol harm-reduction through measures such as alcohol-free sections (family zones) for Mako home games at Trafalgar Park and Lansdown Park and increased availability of water
- the promotion of mental wellbeing and resilience, particularly among young local club-level players

Nelson Marlborough Health Chief Executive Peter Bramley describes the partnership as an innovative and powerful public health initiative.

"As the official health and wellbeing partner of the Tasman Rugby Union, we can leverage the influence that Mako players have among youngsters in our region. We can also the reach the TRU has into clubs, schools and the wider community, to inspire positive health decisions and behaviour," Dr Bramley says.

Tasman Rugby Union Chief Executive Tony Lewis says that promoting healthier living to its player base is important to them individually and as players in an active competitive sport. "As a union we are excited to be working progressively with NMH over three years to achieve our collective goal of encouraging our players to reduce their sugar intake and to be mentally and physically healthier".

This is not the first time the TRU has supported NMH public health initiatives; in 2018 they contributed to the Tap into Water campaign by providing resources that the TRU's rugby development officers were able to take to coaching sessions encouraging the drinking of water as the ultimate sports drink.

Both the Tap into Water campaign and TRU agreement are being led by the NMH Health Promotion team. NMH Health Promotion Manager Lauren Ensor says that the idea for a health partnership came from the smokefree movement that overturned the sponsorship of sporting events by tobacco companies.

“That kind of sponsorship seems so inappropriate now given the proven damage smoking causes. Replacing Coca Cola as a sponsor of a major sports team follows the same logic because we know sugary drinks are the main source of sugar in New Zealanders’ diets and that they are directly connected to tooth decay and obesity,” Ms Ensor says.

“The TRU have made a long-term commitment to health and by partnering with the Mako they are effectively acting as health ambassadors. We aim to see an increasing health focus within rugby locally over the coming years and hopefully that inspires other unions and New Zealand Rugby to follow suit.”

**[www.tap-into-water.nz](http://www.tap-into-water.nz)**

**[www.nmdhb.govt.nz/mako](http://www.nmdhb.govt.nz/mako)**



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