

Diabetes  
Fonds

# Sugar: less is more

*dr Rens Vandenberg*

*Deputy Director / Manager Knowledge & Innovation  
Diabetes Fonds*

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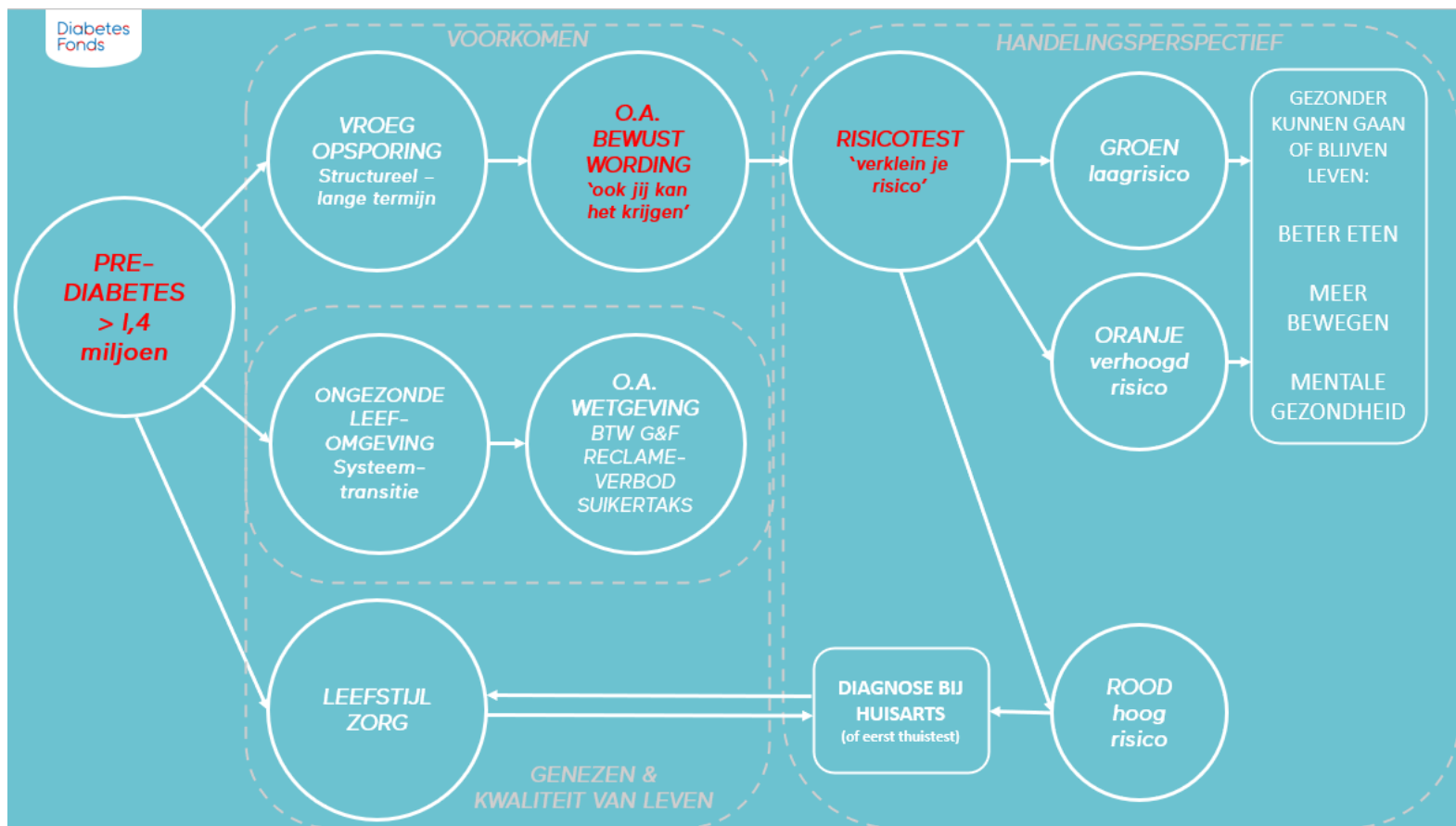
# Rens Vandenberg



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Deputy Directeur / Chief Impact Officer



# What we do at Diabetes Fonds



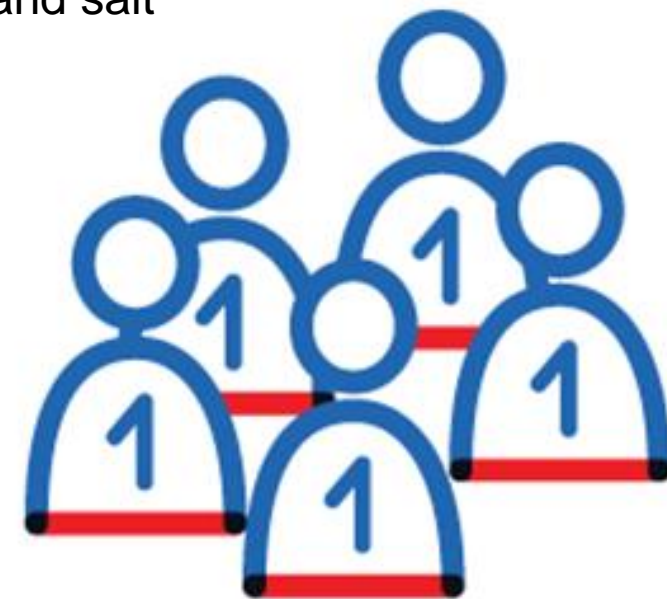
# Sugar: a short (Dutch) history

- 16<sup>th</sup> century: luxury product for the elites
- 17<sup>th</sup> century: import grows
- 18<sup>th</sup> century: sugar refineries in Amsterdam and Rotterdam
- 19<sup>th</sup> century: cultivating sugar beets
- 20<sup>th</sup> century: expanding consumption
- 21<sup>st</sup> century: health crisis?



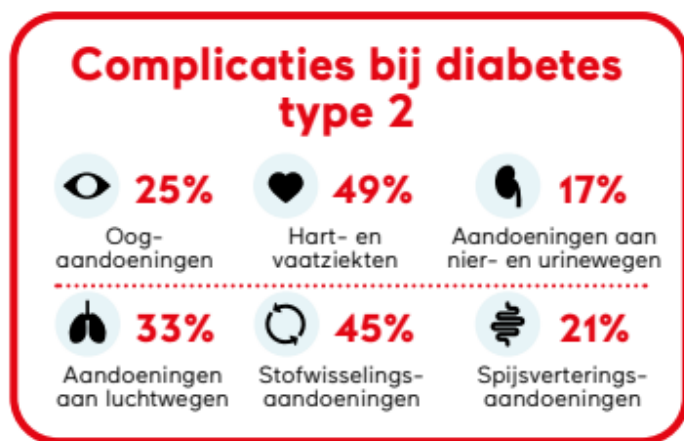
# Sugar and type 2 diabetes

- Unhealthy living habits: inactivity, stress, lack of sleep
- Unhealthy food environment: fast food, sweets and soft drinks everywhere (demand and/or push?)
- Combination leads to unhealthy choices: caloric foods high in sugar, fats and salt
- Unhealthy choices lead to overweight and obesity
- Leads to insulin resistance and prediabetes
- Eventually to type 2 diabetes



# Diabetes one of the biggest health challenges

- In the Netherlands:
  - ↪ 1,1 million people live with type 2 diabetes
  - ↪ 1,4 million people live with prediabetes
  - ↪ Serious health complications
  - ↪ Healthcare professionals increasingly seeing children and young people with type 2 diabetes



**Artsen luiden noodklok: steeds vaker kinderen en jongeren met diabetes type 2**

Kinderartsen zien steeds vaker kinderen en jongeren met diabetes type 2 op hun spreekuur. Een alarmerende ontwikkeling volgens het Diabetes Fonds. Diabetes is een ernstige ziekte die tot veel andere gezondheidsproblemen leidt. Hoe jonger je bent, hoe eerder complicaties kunnen optreden. Daarom luiden het Diabetes Fonds en artsen vandaag, op Wereld Diabetes Dag, de noodklok: we moeten nú het tij keren.

# The bigger picture

- 4 industries: tobacco, alcohol, ultra-processed foods, and online gambling;
- addictive or engineered to tap into basic human needs for comfort and stimulation (Fazzino et al., 2023);
- Make unhealthy eating feel normal and automatic (Sawyer et al., 2021);
- It's a systemic outcome of a profit-driven economy.
- Companies are under pressure to maximize returns — if they don't exploit labor, consumers, or the environment, a competitor will. Publicly traded companies are even legally bound to prioritize shareholder value.



# Public Health, Sugar and Salt: A Ticking Time Bomb

- An unhealthy society undermines both our wellbeing and our shared prosperity;
- As already told; 4 industries make unhealthy eating normal;
- & are responsible for:
  - ~ 2.7 million deaths per year in Europe — nearly a quarter of all deaths
  - ~ Poor diets alone — high in processed meats, sugary drinks, salt, and trans fats — account for 3.5% of all deaths: that's at least 1,072 people every day;
- The 2024 Dutch Public Health Foresight Study (RIVM) confirms this;
- As more people live longer with chronic illness, our healthcare systems face growing demand and shrinking capacity. The economic cost is rising, productivity is falling, and solidarity in funding public healthcare is eroding due to widening inequalities;
- This demands urgent, system-level action — including political courage, market innovation, and a deep rethink of how we value health in our economies.

# Former attempts to reduce sugar in processed foods

- Agreement for the Improvement of Product Composition (Akkoord Verbetering Productsamenstelling) 2014-2022
- Self-regulation of food industry
- RIVM impact analysis: Selfregulation not effective - a pinch less salt per day and less than two sugar cubes
- Taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages creates level playing field => room for innovation




# Shaping together

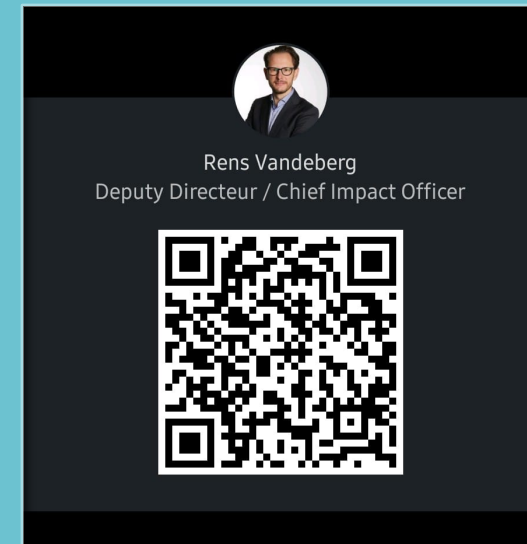
- Creating the society we would like to grow old in together
- Work together to reduce sugar *and* salt
- Smart taxation => level playing field for
- **INNOVATION!!!**
- Combining Topsectors (AgriFood & LSH)
- Combining forces, and becoming frontrunners

# Thank you!

Let's connect & innovate

 [r.vandenberg@diabetesfonds.nl](mailto:r.vandenberg@diabetesfonds.nl)

 (033) 303 2061



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