



Media Release

Under embargo until 00:01am 20 February 2017

Landmark report sets out ambitious roadmap to tackle obesity and unhealthy diets

A landmark study involving more than 100 nutrition and policy experts from 53 organisations across the country has identified critical action areas for Australian governments to tackle the rise of obesity through unhealthy diets – now one of the leading causes of preventable death and disability in Australia.

While Australia is leading the world in some policies to improve population nutrition, such as key aspects of food labelling and keeping nutritious food GST-free, we are falling behind international best practice in others, according to a large national project conducted by Dr Gary Sacks of Deakin University and supported by The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre and the Obesity Policy Coalition.

“We know action is needed on obesity but this report does more than just state the problem. It maps out where Federal, State and Territory governments can each play a part – it’s a constructive way forward that quantifies how we might address this big-picture challenge,” Dr Sacks said.

“It has drawn on expertise from more than 100 nutritionists, health organisations, academics and community groups and builds a comprehensive picture on where we can act to make the most difference. This collaborative effort makes it all the more powerful.”

The study found that huge variation in the implementation of nutrition policies across federal and state governments is diminishing Australia’s efforts to address obesity.

It recommends the development of an overall national strategy and implementation plan for improving population nutrition, the imposition of taxes to increase the price of unhealthy foods (especially sugary drinks), and regulations to reduce exposure of children to marketing of unhealthy food.

“Often good policies exist, but they are not being implemented in a coordinated way,” said Dr Sacks, the leader of the study and a Senior Research Fellow at the Global Obesity Centre in the School of Health and Social Development at Deakin University.

“It’s a good start to have policies for restricting junk foods in school canteens, but if kids are then inundated with unhealthy foods at sports venues, and they see relentless junk food ads on prime-time TV, it doesn’t make it easy for them to eat well.

“There is no silver bullet to helping people eat more healthily – we know from international evidence that we need coordination across federal, state and local government to implement a whole suite of different policies to tackle the problem.”

Unhealthy diets are now one of the leading causes of poor health in Australia. Almost two out of three (63%) Australian adults and one in four (25%) Australian children are overweight or obese. The direct and indirect costs associated with overweight and obesity have been estimated at over \$56 billion each year.

The study identifies policy recommendations for each jurisdiction, prioritising them based on their perceived importance and achievability.

Key findings of the research included:-

- Selected policies at Federal level and in some States and Territories meet global best practice benchmarks. These include:
 - Aspects of food labelling (such as the development of the Health Star Rating system and regulations regarding health claims) (FED)
 - Food prices (no GST on basic foods) (FED)
 - The regular monitoring of population body weight (FED)
 - Menu labelling regulations (ACT/NSW/QLD/SA)
 - Support and training systems to help schools and organisations to provide healthy foods (VIC)
 - Independent statutory health promotion agencies (VIC/WA)
 - Education campaigns promoting healthy eating (WA)

- There are some areas in which we are falling behind international best practice:-
 - Australia does not have an overall national nutrition policy or plan to improve population nutrition.
 - We are falling behind the world in taking action to reduce exposure of children to marketing of unhealthy food.
 - Unlike many other countries, we do not specifically target unhealthy foods (such as sugary drinks) for higher taxes – a policy that international evidence has shown to be effective in changing consumption patterns and raising revenue for preventive health.

- States and Territories vary in their level of implementation of internationally recommended policies.
 - All States and Territories have policies for healthy food provision in schools, but they differ in the way the policies are applied and the extent to which implementation is monitored and supported. Across the country, there are many schools that don't comply with the policies that are in place.
 - Promising new areas of policy action are initiatives to: improve the healthiness of foods in settings controlled by the government (like hospitals, workplaces, government events) (ACT), incorporate population nutrition considerations as part of urban planning provisions (QLD), improve the healthiness of food in restaurants and pubs (SA)

Jane Martin, Executive Manager of the Obesity Policy Coalition and a partner in the research, said a piecemeal approach would not work to turn the tide of obesity in Australia.

“When nearly two-thirds of Australians are overweight or obese, we know that it’s not just about individuals choosing too many of the wrong foods, there are strong environmental factors at play – such as the all pervasive marketing of junk food particularly to children,” she said.

“The study is a valuable roadmap for governments, who have a real ability to influence some of these key drivers of unhealthy diets and obesity. Australians suffering and dying younger and younger from weight-related illness does not have to be a foregone conclusion.”

The study is one of more than 35 research projects supported by The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre, a national collaboration of researchers, policy makers and practitioners identifying what works to prevent lifestyle-related chronic health problems in Australia.

The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre is funded by the NHMRC, the Australian Government Department of Health, the NSW Ministry of Health, ACT Health and the HCF Research Foundation. It is administered and hosted by the Sax Institute.

– ends –

Download the overall report and detailed results for each jurisdiction for the project at www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

Contact:

Rebecca Cook
Senior Manager, Media and Communications – Prevention, Cancer Council Victoria
T: 03 9514 6492
M: 0438 316 435
E: rebecca.cook@cancervic.org.au

Elise Snashall-Woodhams
Senior Media Coordinator, Deakin University
T: 03 9246 8593
M: 0436 409 659
E: e.snashallwoodhams@deakin.edu.au
T: [@DeakinMedia](https://www.instagram.com/DeakinMedia)

[attachment]

Government	Policy areas rated highest (with reference to international best practice)	Priority policy recommendations
Federal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring: Regular monitoring of population body weight at a national level • Food prices: No GST on fresh fruit and vegetables • Food labelling: Health Star Rating scheme and regulations on health and nutrition claims • Dietary guidelines: Food-based dietary guidelines implemented, based on rigorous evidence • Governance: The food regulation system includes procedures for ensuring transparency, co-ordination and broad consultation in policy development 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leadership: establish obesity prevention as a national priority, with a national taskforce, sustained funding, and regular monitoring 2. Leadership: develop a National Nutrition Policy, building on the work that has already been undertaken to inform its development 3. Health levy on sugary drinks: implement a health levy on sugar-sweetened drinks, and invest revenue raised into public health interventions 4. Marketing restrictions: implement mandatory time-based (up to 9:00pm) restrictions of unhealthy food advertising on broadcast media 5. Food labelling: Fast-track changes to the Health Star Rating scheme to address anomalies / design issues, and make the scheme mandatory for all packaged food by July 2019 6. Diet survey: commit sustained funding and ongoing support for a comprehensive diet and nutrition survey conducted every 5-10 years 7. Dietary targets: establish targets for reductions in key nutrients in major food categories related to packaged foods and out-of-home meals, as well as national population dietary intake targets
Australian Capital Territory (ACT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership: Strong commitments to combat the rise of obesity and overweight in the ACT, with clear targets, detailed implementation plans and regular reporting • Food promotion: Sustained efforts to reduce promotion of unhealthy food in selected settings • Food provision: Multiple initiatives to increase the healthiness of school food, mandatory restrictions on unhealthy foods in other government settings 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Food retail: expand existing initiatives to improve availability of healthy foods and limit availability of unhealthy foods in food retail outlets 2. Food promotion: continue efforts to restrict the promotion of unhealthy food and beverages in community and sports settings 3. Monitoring: actively monitor all aspects of food environments, with a focus on food in schools and public sector settings 4. School food: develop and implement healthy food provision guidelines for early childhood settings and non-government schools 5. Community education: continue efforts to improve population nutrition through community education and awareness raising strategies
New South Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food provision: Support and training systems to help schools to provide and promote healthy foods and meals • Menu labelling: Regulations and initiatives to provide nutrition labelling in fast food outlets, including ongoing monitoring and evaluation • Monitoring: Regular monitoring of nutrition status and rates of overweight and obesity in New South Wales children and adults 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monitoring: actively monitor food environments, including marketing of unhealthy foods to children, and food in schools and public sector settings 2. Food promotion: implement policies to restrict the promotion of unhealthy foods in settings controlled or managed by the New South Wales government 3. Menu labelling: enhance existing regulations by requiring food outlets to display more comprehensive nutrition information in an easy-to-understand format 4. Food provision: implement a healthy food procurement and provision policy that applies across all New South Wales government departments and settings under government control 5. School food: introduce stronger incentives and accountability mechanisms for schools to comply with healthy food provision policies
Northern Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food retail: Collaborations with selected remote community stores to encourage stores to promote healthy foods and limit unhealthy foods • Research and evaluation: Sustained funding for research and evaluation into improving food environments and reducing diet-related disease in the Northern Territory • Nutrition education: Support to educators for the inclusion of food and nutrition in school curricula 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monitoring: actively monitor the extent of marketing of unhealthy foods to children, and food in schools and public sector settings 2. School food: improve awareness and compliance with existing healthy food provision policies by extending reporting mechanisms, incentives and support systems 3. Food prices: actively monitor prices of healthy and unhealthy foods across the Northern Territory 4. Food retail: expand existing work with food retailers to improve availability and promotion of healthy foods and limit unhealthy foods 5. Food provision: implement a healthy food procurement and provision policy that applies across all Northern Territory government departments and settings
Queensland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring: Regular monitoring of nutrition status and rates of overweight and obesity in Queensland children and adults • School food: Strong policies and supports in place for healthy school food provision • Governance: Transparency regarding the development of 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Governance: continue efforts to establish a state-wide Queensland Health Promotion Commission (QHPC) to direct health promotion initiatives 2. School food: introduce stronger incentives and accountability mechanisms for schools to comply with healthy food provision policies 3. Food provision: implement a healthy food procurement and provision policy that applies across all Queensland government departments and settings under government control 4. Menu labelling: enhance existing regulations by requiring food outlets to display more comprehensive nutrition information in an easy-to-

	<p>policies related to food and nutrition, including detailed and timely disclosure of political donations and lobbying activities</p>	<p>understand format</p> <p>5. Monitoring: actively monitor food environments, including marketing of unhealthy foods to children, and food in schools and public sector settings</p>
South Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring: Regular monitoring of nutrition status and rates of overweight and obesity in South Australian children and adults Food service: Regulations to provide kilojoule labelling on menus, steps to improve the healthiness of food through the Premier's 'Healthy Kids Menus Initiative' Health-in-all-Policies: Mechanisms to incorporate population health considerations into policy development processes across the South Australian government 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership: develop a comprehensive strategy and implementation plan for addressing population nutrition needs in South Australia School food: mandate implementation of healthy school food guidelines in all schools, and actively monitor compliance Food promotion: implement policies to restrict the promotion of unhealthy foods in settings controlled or managed by the South Australian government Monitoring: actively monitor food environments, including marketing of unhealthy foods to children, and food in schools and public sector settings Leadership: support local governments to develop and implement plans to create healthy food environments and improve population nutrition
Tasmania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership: Strong high-level commitments to focus on health of Tasmanians, including strategies for improving population nutrition School food: Programs and policies for establishing healthy food environments in schools Access to healthy food: State Planning policies include an objective to promote health and wellbeing, several initiatives to increase access to and promotion of healthy food 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Governance: establish and lead a collaborative, state-wide coalition that aims to address population nutrition and obesity Leadership: provide resources for the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the 'Healthy Tasmania Strategy' Food provision: implement a healthy food procurement and provision policy that applies across all Tasmanian government departments and settings under government control School food: provide strong incentives and accountability mechanisms for all schools to implement healthy food provision policies Public education: commit to ongoing support for healthy eating social marketing campaigns involving collaboration with multiple sectors
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding & resources: Independent statutory health promotion agency (VicHealth) in place that includes a focus on improving population nutrition Food provision: Support and training systems to help schools, workplaces and community organisations to provide and promote healthy foods and meals Public education: Strong investment in high quality public education campaigns promoting healthy eating 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Support for communities: establish state-wide structures to support local communities to create and maintain healthy food environments Food provision: implement a healthy food procurement and provision policy that applies across all Victorian government departments and settings under government control Monitoring: actively monitor food environments, including marketing of unhealthy foods to children, and food in schools and public sector settings School food: introduce stronger incentives and accountability mechanisms for schools to comply with healthy food provision policies Food promotion: require all organisations that receive funding from the Victorian government to restrict promotion of unhealthy food as a condition of receiving funding
Western Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding & resources: Independent statutory health promotion agency (Healthway) in place that includes a focus on improving population nutrition Support for communities: Strong investment in high quality public education campaigns promoting healthy eating Nutrition education: Support to educators for the inclusion of food and nutrition in school curricula 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring: actively monitor food environments, including marketing of unhealthy foods to children, and food in schools and public sector settings Education campaigns: continue to invest in sustained, high quality state-wide public education campaigns promoting healthy eating Leadership: support local governments to develop and implement plans to create healthy food environments and improve population nutrition Food promotion: implement policies to restrict the promotion of unhealthy foods in settings controlled or managed by the Western Australian government Food provision: implement a healthy food procurement and provision policy that applies across all Western Australian government departments and settings under government control