



The Australian Prevention  
Partnership Centre  
Systems and solutions for better health

Standing up for...

## Strict limits on junk food marketing to children in our local communities



### Does junk food marketing harm children?

The causes of childhood obesity are complex, but a growing body of evidence shows the barrage of junk food marketing targeted at children is having a detrimental effect on their diet and health.

Three literature reviews analysing years of research all concluded that junk food marketing influences the foods that children like, eat and pester parents to buy.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

The WHO (World Health Organization) has concluded food marketing is a probable cause of childhood overweight and obesity<sup>4</sup> and wants urgent global action to protect young people.<sup>5</sup>

### Junk food promotion in local communities

Australian children are constantly exposed to food marketing in our local communities, from shopping centres to supermarkets<sup>6</sup> and even sports clubs. Most ads promote junk food (energy-dense and nutrient-poor foods).

One NSW study found more than 2000 outdoor food advertisements in the vicinity of 40 primary schools. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 80% of these ads were for junk foods.<sup>7</sup>

One recent ACT survey found 80% food and drink marketing in five major shopping centres was for unhealthy products. Meanwhile, 86% of the food and drink marketed at six surveyed sports venues was unhealthy.<sup>8</sup>



The food industry spends \$400 million each year on advertising their products in Australia.



One in four Australian children is overweight or obese.

The majority of promoted products are high in

FAT

SUGAR

SALT

Food promotion influences the foods that children like, eat and pester parents to buy.

Parents can't simply turn off the television to avoid ads. Surveys show a high concentration of food ads in our shopping centres, supermarkets, cinemas and other public places.

Food industry sponsorship in professional and junior sports clubs is of particular concern. Evidence suggests children are likely to think favourably of club sponsors and buy their products.

Tighter regulation of television food advertising is one of the most cost-effective ways to prevent childhood obesity.

The community wants greater regulation. More than 80% of ACT residents support the government taking steps to reduce unhealthy food and drink marketing to children.



### Does sports club sponsorship affect children's diets?

The food industry also sponsors elite and community sports clubs. In community clubs, sponsors are often allowed to provide company-branded kits and food and drink vouchers as rewards.<sup>9</sup>

One NSW study<sup>10</sup> found the majority of children (69%) thought club sponsors were cool. And while children had some understanding of the firms' aim to promote their products, 85% believed sponsors wanted to 'help out' the club. Almost 60% of children reported that they liked to return the favour by buying the sponsors' products. However, local clubs that used food industry sponsorship reported receiving less than a quarter of their income from these agreements.<sup>9</sup>

### Why is our children's health at risk?

Poor diet is the leading cause of disease in Australia.<sup>14</sup> Australian children get 41% of their calories from junk food,<sup>15</sup> a trend contributing to one in four Australian children being overweight or obese.<sup>15</sup> In the short term, overweight and obese children are more likely to develop health problems like hypertension and insulin resistance. They are also significantly more likely to become overweight adults and face an increased risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers.<sup>16</sup>

### Why regulation is needed

The WHO has called for governments to reduce children's exposure to food marketing, and says there should be no junk food advertising where children gather.<sup>5</sup>

Current mandatory regulations only govern television advertising at certain times. The industry also has two voluntary codes, but critics argue these self-regulating schemes have had little impact on children's exposure to food marketing.<sup>11</sup>

Banning food television advertising during children's peak viewing times is one of the most cost-effective ways to prevent children becoming overweight and obesity and it would also save \$300 million in future health costs.<sup>12</sup>

Surveys consistently show the Australian community wants tighter regulation. One report found around three-quarters of NSW parents supported limiting unhealthy food and drink sponsorship in elite and junior sports.<sup>13</sup>

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