



# Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments

**2019 progress update  
Australian Capital Territory  
(ACT) Government**

March 2019

Further details available at  
[www.foodpolicyindex.org.au](http://www.foodpolicyindex.org.au)

**ACT  
2019**

# Executive summary

Unhealthy diets and obesity are leading contributors to poor health in Australia. Addressing obesity and improving population diets requires a comprehensive government response at Commonwealth and State/Territory levels.

In 2017, a Food Policy Index was developed for Australia to assess the food and diet-related policies that were in place in each jurisdiction, and identify recommended actions for each government based on international best practice.

This report provides a follow up to the 2017 Food Policy Index report. It summarises and assesses the actions taken by the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government (July 2016 – December 2018) in relation to the recommended policies identified in the 2017 report.

## Key areas in which the ACT Government has made progress



Implementation of the Healthy Choices Canberra program, which helps consumers to identify healthier food and drink options across a range of settings



Removal of unhealthy food and drink advertisements on Canberra's public bus network



Regular monitoring of school canteen menus, demonstrating high levels of compliance with the National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines



## Recommended action areas for the ACT Government

The 2017 Food Policy Index report prioritised 14 recommendations for action. Recommended focus areas for the next 12-18 months are:



**Food promotion:** Building on the work of 'Healthier Choices Canberra: Junior Sport', continue efforts to reduce exposure of children to unhealthy food and drink marketing in junior sport settings



**Monitoring and intelligence:** Finalise and implement the Year 7 Health check to facilitate regular surveillance of the weight of secondary school children



**Food provision:** Continue efforts to provide healthier food and drinks in public sector settings, including continued monitoring of compliance with existing policies

# Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI)

In 2017, a Food Policy Index was developed for Australia to assess the extent to which governments in Australia were implementing globally recommended policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments.<sup>1</sup>

The project was conducted as part of INFORMAS,<sup>2</sup> an international network of food policy and public health experts. The project implemented the Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI) tool, developed by INFORMAS to assess government policy across 14 domains related to food environments and applied in >10 countries. As part of the Food-EPI Australia 2017 project, recommended actions for each government (Federal, State and Territory) were developed and prioritised, based on international best practice and consultation with >100 non-government public health experts representing 53 organisations.

## Assessment of progress made

The Food-EPI Australia 2017 report identified and prioritised 14 recommended policy actions for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government, as part of efforts to create healthier food environments and address obesity.

**The purpose of this 2019 Progress Update was to assess progress made by the ACT Government in relation to the recommended policy actions.**

Government officials from each jurisdiction in Australia provided information on actions taken by their government in relation to the recommended actions from the Food-EPI Australia 2017 report. This included all activities from **July 2016** (the date up to which policies were assessed in the 2017 report) to **December 2018**.

The actions were summarised, and progress in relation to each recommendation was assessed by the project team as 'Substantive action', 'Some action' or 'Limited action', based on the criteria in Table 1. The full details of actions taken and progress made by other jurisdictions are available at: [www.foodpolicyindex.org.au](http://www.foodpolicyindex.org.au)

### Substantive action

- Implemented substantive action in relation to all or most components of the recommendation

### Some action

- Implemented action in relation to some components of the recommendation; and/or
- Taken steps to initiate or formulate plans in relation to the recommendation, but relevant actions have not yet been implemented

### Limited action

- Taken no substantive action in relation to the recommendation; and/or
- Made no or very limited progress in the area

Table 1: Criteria for assessment of progress made

<sup>1</sup> Sacks G for the Food-EPI Australia project team. Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments: scorecard and priority recommendations for Australian governments. Melbourne: Deakin University, 2017. Available at: [www.foodpolicyindex.org.au](http://www.foodpolicyindex.org.au)

<sup>2</sup> [www.informas.org](http://www.informas.org)

# Actions taken (July 2016 - December 2018) by the ACT Government in relation to the recommended policies from the 2017 Food Policy Index report

	Domain	Recommended policy action	Progress in relation to recommended action	Assessment
ACT1	Food retail	Expand existing work with retailers and food service outlets to improve in-store availability of healthy foods and limit availability and sales of unhealthy foods	In 2016, the ACT Government implemented the <i>Choose Healthier Business Pilot</i> to trial voluntary in-store actions to promote healthier food and drinks, and reduce the marketing of unhealthy food and drinks. Following the success of the pilot, in September 2018 the ACT Government launched <i>Healthier Choices Canberra</i> , with the aim of making it easier to find healthier food and drink options at kids' entertainment venues, club restaurants, cafes, supermarkets, sports canteens and hospital food outlets. Over 40 local businesses and sports organisations have signed up to the program. A communications and marketing campaign is being rolled out.	Substantive action
ACT2	Food promotion	Continue demonstrating leadership in implementing mechanisms to restrict the promotion of unhealthy food and beverages in community and sports settings, and particularly in children's settings	The ACT Government is implementing the <i>Healthier Choices Canberra (HCC): Junior Sport</i> pilot program to reduce the exposure of children to unhealthy food and drinks in sport and recreation settings. Four state sporting organisations (Netball ACT, Basketball ACT, Canberra Region Rugby League and AFL Canberra) have signed on, with further sports engaged from 2019. The ACT government continues to use the 2016 ACT <i>Healthy Food and Drink Marketing Criteria and Guidelines</i> to determine whether a food or drink item is suitable to be marketed on Transport Canberra buses.	Substantive action
ACT3	Monitoring and intelligence	Implement ongoing monitoring of food environments, with a particular focus on the nutritional quality of food provided / available in early childcare settings, schools, and public sector settings	The ACT Government implements mandatory Healthy Food and Drink Choices Policies in public schools (2015), government workplaces (2016) and ACT Health facilities (2015). Regular monitoring is undertaken to assess whether the requirements of the policies are being met and substantial improvements have been measured. In 2017, a review of the ACT's Traffic Light Food and Drink Classification System was undertaken to assist in reviewing effectiveness of the ACT Government's healthy food and drink choice policies. ACT continues to monitor school canteens against the National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines, through regular menu reviews conducted by an external agency.	Some action
ACT4	Food provision	Develop and implement healthy food provision guidelines for early childhood settings and non-government schools	The ACT Government continues to support the Kids at Play website, which aims to provide resources to families of children aged 0-5 years and early childhood educators to promote a nutritious, balanced diet and to limit the intake of discretionary foods (e.g., sugar-sweetened beverages). Fresh Tastes supports ACT primary schools to improve their food and drink environments, including food and drink provision. Currently, 93 of 108 ACT Government primary schools, 15 of 24 Catholic primary schools, and 12 of 17 independent primary schools are participating in the program. Recruitment is continuing.	Substantive action
ACT5	Support for communities	Continue efforts to improve population nutrition through community education and awareness raising strategies	<i>Healthier Choices Canberra</i> (launched September 2018) is supported by a dedicated communications and marketing campaign. The campaign utilises a range of channels to engage the community in healthier eating, and guide consumers to healthier choices at participating businesses. In June 2018, ACT Health implemented a kilojoule menu labelling awareness campaign. The four-week campaign aimed to encourage consumers to notice, read, understand and use kilojoule displays to guide healthier food and drink choices in the ACT. Nutrition communications and healthy eating information for the wider community (website, weekly newsletter) is also provided by an external provider.	Some action

ACT6	Governance	Implement formal health impact assessments that consider population nutrition and health impacts as part of policy development and proposal process	The ACT Healthy Weight Initiative established a formal whole of government governance mechanism to integrate health considerations in to policy making across sectors. All ACT Cabinet submissions are required to report against a triple bottom line, and regulatory impact statements are conducted when required.	Some action
ACT7	Food retail	Investigate options for amending the Territory Plan and associated planning controls to decrease access to unhealthy take-away foods and increasing access to healthy food outlets	The ACT Government is committed to the promotion and provision of healthier food choices in the retail sector through <i>Healthier Choices Canberra</i> . In its current form, the ACT planning system does not provide close control over the location or density of healthy (or unhealthy) food retail outlets, and so this recommendation is considered to be not directly implementable.	Some action
ACT8	Food promotion	Require all organisations that receive funding from the ACT government to restrict all promotion (including sponsorship) related to unhealthy food and beverages as a condition of receiving funding	The ACT Government is implementing the <i>Healthier Choices Canberra (HCC): Junior Sport</i> pilot program with the aim of reducing the exposure of children to unhealthy food and drinks in sport and recreation settings. Activities being delivered under <i>HCC: Junior Sport</i> include a focus on upskilling the sports sector to negotiate and secure sponsorship, with an emphasis on aligning junior club sponsorships with health and wellbeing values.	Some action
ACT9	Support for communities	Put in place community-wide structures and associated resources for supporting community-based interventions designed to create and maintain healthy food environments across multiple settings	In September 2018, the ACT Government launched <i>Healthier Choices Canberra</i> , making it easier to find healthier food and drink options at kids' entertainment venues, club restaurants, cafes, supermarkets, sports canteens and hospital food outlets. Over 40 local businesses and sports organisations have signed up to the program. There are no other structures in place to support comprehensive community-led interventions designed to create and maintain healthy food environments across multiple settings.	Substantive action
ACT10	Monitoring and intelligence	Provide funding for oversampling for the ACT in the triennial National Health Survey for the purposes of monitoring BMI and key nutrition indicators of children and adults	ACT Health's Epidemiology Section has had initial discussions with the Australian Bureau of Statistics regarding the potential for oversampling the National Health Survey. For the purposes of monitoring BMI and key nutrition indicators, ACT Health administers the ACT General Health Survey, the ACT Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (ACTPANS) and the Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug Survey.	Some action
ACT11	Food labelling	Enhance existing menu labelling regulations by requiring outlets to display interpretive nutrition labelling, potentially through adaptation of the Health Star Rating scheme	The ACT Review of Display of Nutritional Information for Food report (tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly in September 2017) noted some use of kilojoule information on menu boards in the ACT, and strong business compliance. The report recommended that any move to change or expand the ACT's current menu labelling requirements be undertaken through engagement and discussion at national fora on food and health, supported by a robust policy process. Kilojoule menu displays are currently under a national review, and, when finalised, the ACT Government will consider enhanced labelling requirements.	Some action
ACT12	Monitoring and intelligence	Introduce regular measuring of children's height and weight at key stages of primary and secondary schools, on an 'opt-out' consent basis	Children's height and weight is measured in primary school by ACT Health at age 5/6 in the Kindergarten Health Check (yearly) and at age 11/12 in the ACTPANS (three yearly) on an opt-out consent basis. Children's height and weight will be measured in secondary schools by ACT Health at age 12/13 in the Year 7 Health Check, which will replace the ACTPANS from 2019. At this stage, the consent model will be on an opt-in basis, however this is still to be determined.	Substantive action
ACT13	Governance	Modify the government lobby register to require more detailed reporting, including details of specific lobbying activities	At the time of this report, an ACT Legislative Assembly Committee was investigating developing the public register of lobbyists in Canberra.	Some action
ACT14	Governance	Improve transparency of political donations by introducing real-time declaration of political donations	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action

# Acknowledgements

This project was conducted by researchers within the Global Obesity Centre, a World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention within the Institute for Health Transformation at Deakin University, in conjunction with the Obesity Policy Coalition.

Funding for this project has been provided from the Australian Government's Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF). The MRFF provides funding to support health and medical research and innovation, with the objective of improving the health and wellbeing of Australians. MRFF funding has been provided to The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre under the Boosting Preventative Health Research Program. Further information on the MRFF is available at [www.health.gov.au/mrff](http://www.health.gov.au/mrff). Gary Sacks is the recipient of an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DE160100307) and a Heart Foundation Future Leader Fellowship from the National Heart Foundation of Australia.

The project forms part of INFORMAS (International Network for Food and Obesity/NCD's Research, Monitoring, Action and Support), a global network of public interest organisations and researchers that seek to monitor and benchmark public and private sector actions to create healthier food environments and reduce obesity and NCD's globally.

We would like to thank all of the Australian Capital Territory Government officials that contributed their time and expertise to this report.

The contents of this published material are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not reflect the views of the funding partners.

**Cite this report as:** Sacks G, Robinson E for the Food-EPI Australia project team. Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments: 2019 Progress update, Australian Capital Territory Government. Melbourne: Deakin University, 2019.

For more details on the Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI) project go to: [www.foodpolicyindex.org.au](http://www.foodpolicyindex.org.au)



