



# **Policies** for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments

**Scorecard and priority  
recommendations for the  
Victorian government**

February 2017

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

**VIC**



## 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 the Commonwealth and State/Territory levels.

101 experts from 53 organisations assessed the extent to which governments in Australia are implementing globally recommended policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments.

# Top 3

**Things Victoria is doing well**  
(with reference to international best practice)



Independent statutory health promotion agency (VicHealth) in place that includes a focus on improving population nutrition



Support and training systems to help schools, workplaces and community organisations to provide and promote healthy foods and meals



Strong investment in high quality public education campaigns promoting healthy eating

## Top 5



### Policy recommendations for Victoria

#### Support for communities:

establish state-wide structures to support local communities to create and maintain healthy food environments

1

#### Food provision:

implement a healthy food procurement and provision policy that applies across all Victorian government departments and settings under government control

2

#### Monitoring:

actively monitor food environments, including marketing of unhealthy foods to children, and food in schools and public sector settings

3

#### School food:

introduce stronger incentives and accountability mechanisms for schools to comply with healthy food provision policies

4

#### Food promotion:

require all organisations that receive funding from the Victorian government to restrict promotion of unhealthy food as a condition of receiving funding

5

# Obesity and diet-related diseases in Australia are a public health crisis

**Unhealthy diets and obesity are leading contributors to poor health and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Australia.<sup>1</sup>**

Almost 2 out of 3 (63%) Australian adults and 1 in 4 (25%) Australian children are overweight or obese.<sup>2</sup> The costs associated with overweight and obesity have been estimated at over \$56 billion each year.<sup>3</sup>

## Comprehensive government policy action is needed

Addressing obesity and improving population diets requires a comprehensive government response at Commonwealth and State/Territory levels.

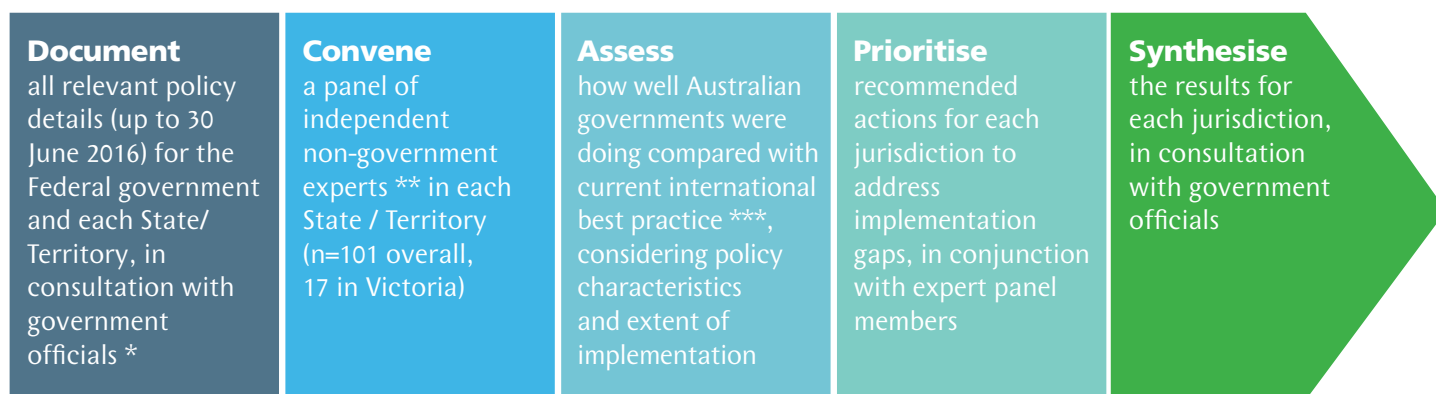
This project aimed to assess the extent to which governments in Australia are implementing globally recommended policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments, and identify prioritised actions for each government.

## Food Policy Index

A Food Policy Index was developed for Australia to assess the food- and diet-related policies that are in place and identify gaps. This was based on the Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI)<sup>4</sup> that was developed by INFORMAS<sup>5</sup>, an international network of experts in food policy, and has been applied in several countries.

The Food-EPI covers all of the key policies in this area, including specific aspects of food environments (such as food composition, labelling, promotion, prices and provision) that have been shown to have an important impact on population diets and obesity, and infrastructure support (including leadership, governance, monitoring and funding) that helps facilitate effective policy implementation.

## Process for assessing extent of policy implementation in Australia



<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016. Australian Burden of Disease Study (2011)

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; 2017: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/overweight-and-obesity/>

<sup>3</sup> Colagiuri S, et al. The cost of overweight and obesity in Australia. MJA 2010; 192 (5):260-264

<sup>4</sup> Swinburn B, et al. Monitoring and benchmarking government policies and actions to improve the healthiness of food environments: the government healthy food environment policy index. *Obesity Reviews* 2013; 14 Suppl 1:24-37

<sup>5</sup> International Network for Food and Obesity/NCDs Research, Monitoring and Action Support

\* Detailed summaries of each government's policy details are available at [www.foodpolicyindex.org.au](http://www.foodpolicyindex.org.au)

\*\* Panel members included academics, nutritionists, and senior representatives from health NGOs and community groups with expertise in population nutrition and / or obesity prevention

\*\*\* Global benchmarks as identified by INFORMAS. As more countries complete the Food-EPI assessment process and new evidence of policy action emerges, benchmarks are likely to change, informing future iterations of the tool. The Federal government and each State/Territory were assessed separately; however, in some policy areas, policy development involves collaboration between Federal and State/Territory governments, and implementation of national guidance and policy is at the discretion of each jurisdiction.



# Scorecard for Victoria



Expert panel's assessment of Victoria's level of implementation (up to 30 June 2016) of key policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments

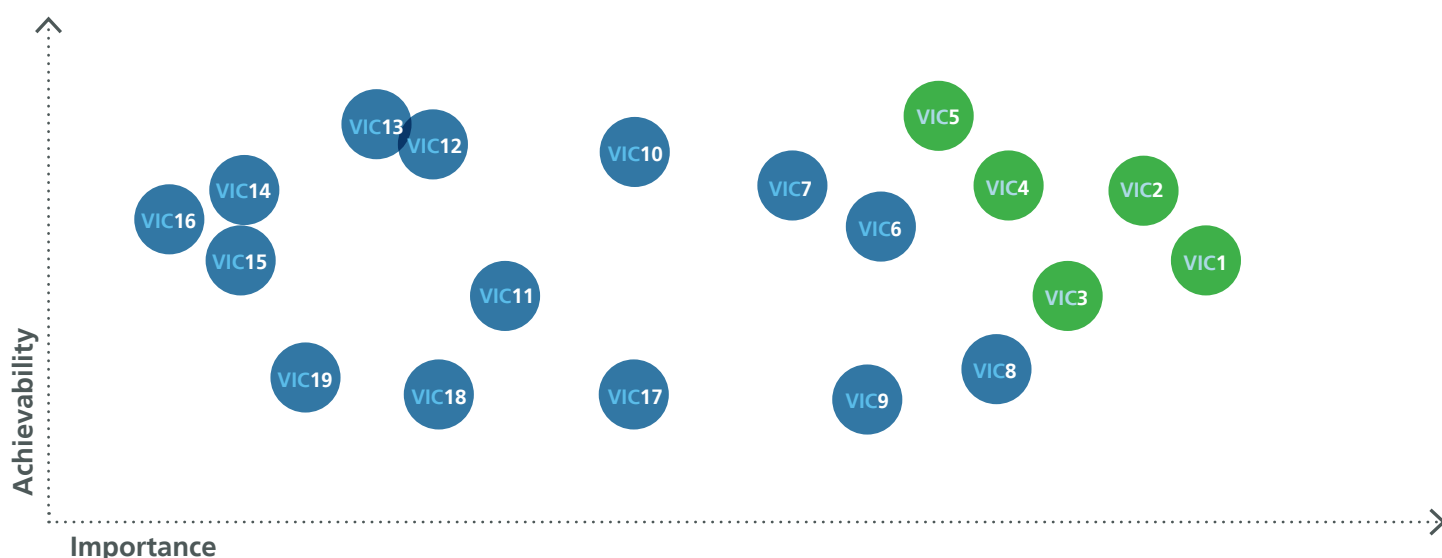
Very little, if any    Low    Medium    High



Category	Policy	Implementation Level
Food labelling	Menu labelling	Medium
Food promotion	Restrict promotion of unhealthy food in non-broadcast media	Very little, if any
	Restrict promotion of unhealthy food in children's settings	Low
Food provision	Policies in schools promote healthy food choices	Medium
	Policies in public settings promote healthy food choices	Medium
	Support and training systems for public sector settings	High
	Support and training systems for private companies	Medium
Food retail	Planning policies and zoning laws: unhealthy foods	Very little, if any
	Planning policies and zoning laws: healthy foods	Low
	Retail store availability of healthy and unhealthy foods	Low
	Food service outlet availability of healthy and unhealthy foods	Low
Leadership	Strong, visible, political support for population nutrition	Low
	Comprehensive implementation plan linked to state/national needs	Medium
	Priorities for reducing inequalities related to nutrition	Medium
Governance	Restricting commercial influence on policy development	Low
	Transparency and access to government information	High
	Assessing the potential health impacts of all policies	Medium
Monitoring & intelligence	Monitoring food environments	Medium
	Monitoring population nutrition intakes	Medium
	Monitoring population body weight	Medium
	Evaluation of major programs and policies	Medium
Funding & resources	Research funding for obesity & NCD prevention	Medium
	Independent health promotion agency	High
Support for communities	Mechanisms to support community-based interventions	Medium
	Implementation of social marketing campaigns	Medium
	Food and nutrition in education curricula	Medium

# Prioritised recommended actions for the Victorian government

	Domain	Recommended policy action
VIC1	Support for communities	Put in place overarching state-wide structures, with associated resources, to provide broad and coordinated support for creating and maintaining healthy food environments at the community level across multiple settings
VIC2	Food provision	Establish a whole-of-government policy on healthy food procurement and provision across all Victorian government departments and settings under government control (e.g., sport and recreation facilities, community events)
VIC3	Monitoring and intelligence	Implement ongoing monitoring of food environments, including the extent of marketing of unhealthy foods to children, and the nutritional quality of food provided / available in schools and public sector settings (such as hospitals, other government facilities providing food service)
VIC4	Food provision	Improve compliance with the 'School Canteens and Other School Food Services Policy' in all schools (including government, independent and Catholic schools) by extending reporting mechanisms, incentives and support systems
VIC5	Food promotion	Require all organisations, such as community groups and sports clubs, that receive funding from the Victorian government (including VicHealth) to restrict all promotion (including sponsorship) related to unhealthy food and beverages as a condition of receiving funding
VIC6	Food retail	Develop guidelines and offer co-ordinated support to local governments on ways to improve the availability of healthy foods in retail settings, and decrease the availability and promotion of unhealthy foods in retail settings
VIC7	Food promotion	Implement policies to restrict the promotion of unhealthy food and beverages in settings controlled or managed by the Victorian government (e.g., public transport, bus shelters, government-owned billboards, sporting facilities and events)
VIC8	Governance	Implement formal health impact assessments as part of policy development and proposal processes, including explicit details about the consideration of potential impacts of policies on population nutrition and health
VIC9	Food retail	Amend the planning framework to explicitly make health and healthy food environments a priority in state planning, as a way to facilitate local governments limiting the placement / density of unhealthy food outlets while supporting healthy food outlets
VIC10	Food provision	Demonstrate long-term commitment and increased support for the 'Achievement Program' and the 'Health Eating Advisory Service', which support a wide range of public and private-sector settings to implement healthy food policies
VIC11	Support for communities	Integrate practical skills in growing and cooking foods, as well as nutrition information, into the school curriculum across all school years in a way that supports existing teaching priorities
VIC12	Food retail	Implement and promote incentives or accreditation schemes (potentially based on the 'Achievement Program') for sports and recreation clubs to sell a healthier range of food and beverages whilst limiting availability of unhealthy food and beverages
VIC13	Support for communities	Commit to ongoing, long-term support for social marketing campaigns promoting healthy eating, as part of broader efforts to improve population nutrition
VIC14	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
VIC15	Food labelling	Extend the proposed implementation of kilojoule menu labelling in fast food chains to apply to more settings (e.g., cinemas) with potential adaptation of the Health Star Rating scheme for menu labelling purposes
VIC16	Food retail	Develop and implement programs, including incentives or accreditation schemes, for restaurants, pubs and clubs to improve the healthiness of their menu options, building on the 'Healthy Dining Victoria - Pubs and Clubs' initiative
VIC17	Governance	Establish governance structures to improve policy coherence regarding agriculture, food, health, and innovation / research and development policies
VIC18	Governance	Modify the government lobby register to require more detailed reporting, including details of specific lobbying activities (such as when lobbying is occurring, who is involved, and the issues discussed)
VIC19	Governance	Improve transparency of political donations by introducing online, real-time declaration of political donations over \$1,000



Recommended actions were developed by panel members, and prioritised taking into account their perceptions of the relative importance (including perceived need, likely impact and equity) and achievability (including feasibility, level of acceptability to a wide range of key stakeholders, affordability and cost-effectiveness) of each action

# Benchmarks of good practice Policy actions targeting food environments

Domain	Policy area	International best practise (as identified by INFORMAS)	Leading State / Territory in Australia (as per assessments as part of this project)
Food labelling	Menu labelling	<b>South Korea</b> All fast-food outlets required to display detailed nutrition information (incl. energy, total sugars, protein, saturated fat and sodium) on menus	<b>ACT/NSW/QLD/SA</b> Large fast food chains required to display average energy content on menus and overall average daily energy intake. NSW supports continued monitoring and evaluation of menu labelling
Food promotion	Restrict promotion of unhealthy food in non-broadcast media	<b>Quebec, Canada</b> Ban on all commercial advertising directed to children (under 13 years) through any medium	<b>ACT</b> Advertising of unhealthy food on government-run buses is restricted, other options under consideration
	Restrict promotion of unhealthy food in children's settings	<b>Spain</b> Legislation requires that kindergartens and schools are free from all advertising	<b>ACT</b> Advertising and promotion of red/amber foods or drinks is restricted at ACT Health facilities and activities. ACT actively exploring options that reduce promotion of unhealthy foods in children's settings
Food provision	Policies in schools promote healthy food choices	<b>UK</b> Mandatory nutritional standards for all food served in schools -restrictions on high fat/sugar/salt/processed foods	All states and territories have policies for healthy school food provision. ACT has several initiatives designed to increase policy compliance, including a requirement for license agreements with canteen operators and active monitoring. WA requires principals to develop whole-of-school food provision policies
	Policies in public settings promote healthy food choices	<b>New York City, USA</b> Mandatory nutritional standards for all food purchased/sold by city agencies (hospitals, prisons, aged care, health facilities)	<b>ACT</b> Mandatory restrictions on the sale/promotion/placement of unhealthy foods in ACT Health facilities, policies and commitments to improve healthy food choices in all government workplaces and facilities
	Support and training systems for public sector settings	<b>Japan</b> Mandatory oversight and monitoring by dietitian/nutritionist (incl. menu development) for all government facilities providing >250 meals/day	<b>VIC</b> Healthy Eating Advisory Service (HEAS) provides a wide range of resources to support settings such as childcare centres, schools, health services, and sports centres to provide healthy foods and drinks
	Support and training systems for private companies	<b>UK</b> Responsibility Deal included collective pledges for health at work, including a focus on healthier staff restaurants - over 160 signatories	<b>WA</b> The Healthier Workplace WA program provides a number of free services to support workplaces state-wide to make cultural, environmental and policy changes that support and encourage positive lifestyle behaviours amongst employees
Food retail	Planning policies and zoning laws: unhealthy foods	<b>South Korea</b> 'Green Food Zones' around schools (200 metre radius) in which sales of 'unhealthy' foods are prohibited	<b>QLD</b> Incorporates health as a key consideration as part of the Planning Act, and provides detailed resources (Active Healthy Communities) for local councils on ways to limit access to unhealthy fast food outlets
	Planning policies and zoning laws: healthy foods	<b>USA</b> Provision of grants for states to provide financial/other types of assistance to attract healthier retail outlets to underserved areas	<b>QLD</b> Provides detailed information and resources (Active Healthy Communities) for local government on ways to promote healthy food choices through the built environment and encourage outlets that sell healthy food
	In-store availability of healthy and unhealthy foods	<b>UK</b> Agreement to increase availability of fruit and vegetables at convenience stores, and commitments (as part of the Responsibility Deal) to decrease availability of confectionery at supermarket checkouts	<b>NT</b> Ongoing formal commitment to support selected remote community stores in encouraging in-store availability of healthy foods and discouraging availability of unhealthy foods
	Food service outlet availability of healthy and unhealthy foods	<b>Singapore</b> Government partnership ('Healthier Hawker' program) with selected food vendors to improve healthiness of take-away food	<b>SA</b> South Australian Premier's Healthy Kids Menus Initiative aims to increase the provision of and access to healthy menu options for children in South Australian restaurants, cafes, hotels and clubs

# Benchmarks of good practice Infrastructure support actions

Domain	Policy area	International best practise (as identified by INFORMAS)	Leading State / Territory in Australia (as per assessments as part of this project)
Leadership	Strong, visible, political support for population nutrition	<b>New York City, USA</b> Mayor (Michael Bloomberg) showed strong political leadership in introducing landmark food policies, including restrictions on trans-fat and portion size restrictions on sugary-drinks	<b>ACT</b> Healthy Weight Initiative is a whole of government initiative to combat the rise of obesity and overweight in the ACT, led by the Chief Minister with regular reporting of progress
	Comprehensive implementation plan linked to state/national needs	<b>European Union</b> The European Food and Nutrition Action Plan 2015-20 outlines clear strategic goals, guiding principles, objectives, priorities and tools	<b>ACT</b> The 'Towards Zero Growth: Healthy Weight Action Plan' (the HWAP) outlines clear targets for obesity rates, details a range of policy and program initiatives across health and non-health sectors, with a taskforce and dedicated implementation groups established
	Priorities for reducing inequalities related to nutrition	<b>New Zealand</b> Ministry of Health upholds contracts with NGOs/other institutions to prioritise Maori health and Maori specific needs in service delivery, service development and planning	<b>WA</b> Key strategic health promotion documents identify priority groups, WA government has highlighted a strategic focus on improving nutrition in vulnerable groups, several targeted initiatives
Governance	Restricting commercial influence on policy development	<b>USA</b> Mandatory and publicly accessible lobby registers – including extensive reporting of nature of lobbying activities	<b>QLD</b> Lobby register includes mandatory reporting of the type and purpose of lobbying conduct, real-time disclosure of political donations
	Transparency and access to government information	<b>Australia</b> Open access principles across governments, FSANZ processes for extensive stakeholder engagement in the development of new standards	All governments across Australia have open data policies, frameworks for information access, and policies and procedures that ensure transparency
	Assessing the potential health impacts of all policies	<b>SA, Australia</b> Mechanisms to incorporate population health considerations into policy development processes across the South Australian government	<b>SA</b> Mechanisms to incorporate population health considerations into policy development processes across the South Australian government
Monitoring and intelligence	Monitoring food environments	<b>New Zealand</b> Comprehensive database of nutrient information for different foods, continued monitoring of school food environments nationwide	<b>ACT</b> Extensive monitoring of unhealthy food marketing to children, and nutritional quality of food in public sector settings
	Monitoring population nutrition intake	<b>USA</b> National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), conducted annually, provides detailed national information on health status, disease history and nutritional intake of adults and children	<b>WA</b> Health and Wellbeing Surveillance System collects annual data on key nutrition indicators, Nutrition Monitoring Survey series collects data every three years on community perceptions and attitudes around nutrition
	Monitoring population body weight	<b>UK</b> National Child Measurement Program for children's BMI, assessing children ages 4-6 and 10-11	<b>ACT/NSW/QLD/SA</b> Regular surveys of self-reported BMI from adults and children
	Evaluation of major programs and policies	<b>USA</b> The National Institutes for Health (NIH) provides dedicated funding for research that evaluates new policies/programs expected to influence obesity related behaviours	<b>QLD</b> Health and Wellbeing Strategy outlines key evaluation questions, with associated guidelines - specific evaluation framework under development. All programs required to conduct evaluations
Funding and resources	Research funding for obesity & NCD prevention	<b>New Zealand</b> Approximately 11% of the Health Research Council's total budget of \$70M spent on population nutrition and/or prevention of obesity and NCDs	<b>NT/WA</b> Provides sustained funding for research that improves foods environments, reduces obesity, NCDs and their related inequalities
	Independent health promotion agency	<b>Victoria, Australia</b> VicHealth is an independent statutory health promotion agency	<b>VIC/WA</b> Independent statutory health promotion agencies, include an objective to improve population nutrition
Support for communities	Mechanisms to support community-based interventions	<b>Australia</b> Previous National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health (now defunct) provided State and Territory level support for initiatives aimed at obesity and NCD prevention	<b>VIC</b> Multiple targeted strategies, policies and initiatives at state and local level designed to create healthier food environments (schools, childcare centres, workplaces, food outlets, sporting clubs, businesses and local government)
	Implementation of social marketing campaigns	Multiple international examples	<b>WA</b> Funds several obesity and NCD prevention social marketing campaigns, online and community programs, including LiveLighter that has now been adopted in multiple states / territories
	Food and nutrition in education curricula	<b>UK</b> National framework for core food competency skills and knowledge in children ages 5-16 years	<b>ACT/WA</b> Ongoing support and provision of resources to educators for the inclusion of food and nutrition in school curricula

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