



Committee Secretary
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: obesitycommittee.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: Submission to the Select Committee into the Obesity Epidemic in Australia

Introduction

Parents' Voice is a network of over 11,000 parents from across Australia who advocate for improved food and physical activity environments for Australian children. Parents' Voice is financially supported by Diabetes Victoria, VicHealth and YMCA.

Parents' Voice appreciates the opportunity to participate in the inquiry being conducted by the Select Committee into the Obesity Epidemic in Australia. The following submission is on behalf of our 11,000 parents, and reflects their views and efforts to reduce the burden of obesity on Australian children.

More than 1 in 4 Australian children are above a healthy weight. These children are at greater risk of becoming obese adults and therefore at greater risk of developing chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, cancer and heart disease. Urgent action is needed to ensure that this generation does not become the first to live shorter lives than their parents.

Recommendations

We endorse the full recommendations of the [Tipping the Scales](#) report, and we wish to highlight the following 4 key actions. These priorities and quotes have come from a survey of Parents' Voice members in June/July 2018:

- 1. Establishing obesity prevention as a national priority with a national taskforce, sustained funding, regular and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of key measures and regular reporting around targets.**

Parents believe that a well resourced national taskforce will hasten the rate of healthy change, and provide national coordinated support.

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“Having a national taskforce that is funded and coordinated across all states and territories will hasten the speed of change, and provide consistent messaging around the urgency and seriousness of the issue to manufacturers and consumers.”

“If obesity prevention is a national priority with allocated funding and taskforce then the rest of the actions will be actioned and monitored. Tax and food reformulation will have benefits on the whole population.”

“We must approach it from a systematic approach and not just rely on personal behaviour change”

2. Legislation to implement time-based restrictions on exposure of children (under 16 years of age) to unhealthy food and drink marketing on free-to-air television up until 9.30pm.

One of Parents' Voice key concerns is junk food and drink advertising to children. These ads surround children and government legislation to regulate the hours that these ads can be shown on TV is an important first step. Since 2004 Parents' Voice has worked to highlight the impact of junk food advertising on Australian children and the failure of the advertising industry's self regulation to protect children.

“The evidence is clear that food marketing negatively impacts children's food consumption. Children continue to be exposed to high levels of food advertising during peak TV viewing times. Current regulations do not sufficiently cover the extent and impact of children's food marketing exposures.”

3. Setting clear reformulation targets for food manufacturers, retailers and caterers with established time periods and regulation to assist compliance if not met.

Almost 40 per cent of the daily energy intake of Australian children comes from discretionary foods¹ and almost three quarters of Australian children exceed the World Health Organisation's guidelines for added sugar intake².

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4364.0.55.007 - Australian Health Survey: Nutrition First Results - Foods and Nutrients, 2011-12 <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4364.0.55.007~2011-12~Main%20Features~Discretionary%20foods~700>

² Linggang Lei, Anna Rangan, Victoria M. Flood, and Jimmy Chun Yu Louie, *Dietary intake and food sources of added sugar in the Australian population*, British Journal of Nutrition (2016), 115, 868–877

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Reformulation targets to reduce the amount of added sugar, saturated fat and sodium in processed foods would assist population health and complement other measures to improve the diet of Australians such as the Health Star Rating System and the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

“Regulating the food industry is the most important step to reducing obesity. Currently, it can be very confusing to the consumer what is healthy and what is not.”

“I believe that the emphasis needs to be placed on making the healthy choices the easy choices -- ie, the default option -- which means strategies which don't rely on millions of people making the right conscious decisions. Use more behavioural insights ('nudges'), for example. Food reformulation is a no-brainer.”

4. Placing a health levy on sugary drinks to increase the price by 20%.

A health levy on sugary drinks has great support amongst Australian parents. Our recent survey shows more than 90 per cent in support of such a levy.

In addition, parents were keen to draw the link between the revenue raised and other initiatives that improve the nutrition and activity levels of children with many parents pointing out that the levy could fund a national taskforce on obesity.

“I think a levy will bring about the most change and is proving to be somewhat successful overseas. We need more direct strategies to impact on consumers (e.g a levy) but also in conjunction with other strategies so they support one another (e.g. food reformulation and education).”

Conclusion

Parents' Voice knows that there are many areas where action can be taken to tackle obesity in our community and urges the Committee to consider the [Tipping the Scales](#) report.

In addition, Parents' Voice is aware of and supports the submission to this Senate Select Committee by the Obesity Policy Coalition.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/E33C412F3A8760EE539F490CF517FF27/S0007114515005255a.pdf/div-class-title-dietary-intake-and-food-sources-of-added-sugar-in-the-australian-population-div.pdf>

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Finally, parents were keen to highlight that measures which shame children about their weight but do little to address the underlying ecosystem of factors influencing our unhealthy diets and sedentary lives, are not effective and are detrimental to the mental wellbeing of children of all weights.

"Businesses should not be able to make profits at the expense of our most vulnerable."

Parents' Voice is available to elaborate further on our submission, please contact us on: 03 9667 1742. Or at: hello@parentsvoice.org.au.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alice Pryor".

Alice Pryor
Campaigns Manager
Parents' Voice

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