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**Food policies should focus on health**  
*Article in the Australian New Zealand Journal of Public Health*

“The impact of food on health is a key element if we are going to deal with the obesity epidemic effectively”, according to Michael Moore, CEO of the Public Health Association.

Mr Moore was commenting on an article by Dr Heather Yeatman that is published in the *Australian New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

Food standards, a key focus of government food policy, have been shaped by economic interests since the formation of the National Food Standards Authority in 1991 according to Dr Yeatman, “Standards were reviewed in line with the economic imperatives of national standardisation, ‘minimal effective regulation’ and timeliness, so as not to disadvantage food industry innovation and competitiveness”.

Dr Yeatman argues that the impact of voluntary organisations has not been able to compete with the influence of industry. “However, their role, limited by the voluntary nature of their activities, was primarily responsive to proposed changes to food standards.”

The article argues that the time has come to ensure that a comprehensive government approach is taken to food as part of the task of addressing chronic disease and particularly the risks associated with obesity. The combination of environmental crises, obesity epidemic, food safety challenges and the current stage of the electoral cycle provides the necessary policy window to bring about food and nutrition policy changes.

Her article has effectively called on the government to grapple with the tensions between trade and industry on the one hand and the health of Australians on the other, “what is needed is the political and professional commitment”, she concludes.

There are a number of models showing the way forward that are identified by Dr Yeatman. One of these is the “draft Second WHO European Action Plan for Food and Nutrition Policy (2007-12). It reinforces a whole-of-government commitment to a ‘health in all policies’ approach and that ‘the primary obligation of governments is to formulate, monitor and evaluate a comprehensive food and nutrition policy’ with specified health goals.”

Mr Moore welcomed the article as a timely reminder of the importance of food and nutrition in improving community health.

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*The Public Health Association of Australia is a non-party-political organisation with a membership drawn from more than 40 health-related professions. The Association makes a major contribution to health policy in Australia and has branches in every State and Territory*

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