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Junk food ads making kids sick

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) has joined a growing chorus of calls for a ban on junk food advertising to children in the wake of a new report demonstrating links between junk food ads and high rates of obesity. The latest research findings from the Cancer Council and Heart Foundation show that advertising and marketing directly influence children's food choices, with almost one in four currently overweight or obese.

"The truth is that our children are being ruthlessly exposed to junk food marketing. High rates of obesity among young people lead directly to a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension and diabetes leading to a reduced life expectancy. The Australian Government must provide leadership by introducing legislation nationally that bans all television food advertising at times when children comprise the majority of the viewing audience. The legislation also needs to include an effective system for enforcement and compliance," said Michael Moore, Chief Executive Officer of the PHAA.

"All marketing methods - including sponsorship of children's sport - would need to be covered with the proposed restrictions on television advertising likely to lead to an increase in other forms of marketing. Such an approach is consistent with the National Preventative Health Taskforce recommendation that junk food marketing should be phased out from television before 9pm. A mandated regulatory approach to marketing of unhealthy food and beverages needs to be part of an overall national food and nutrition policy which also includes broader strategies to improve health across the entire population.

"To complement these measures, PHAA would like to see the introduction of community service announcements consistent with recommendations for healthy eating to be screened during children's viewing times; and appropriate regulation of other forms of food marketing beyond television.

"Of particular note, the latest research found that one-quarter of students had chosen to eat at a fast food outlet because it had a special offer or giveaway with a meal. Almost 20 per cent chose a food or drink because it was linked to a movie or sports personality.

"Junk food marketing directed at today's kids is contributing to a situation where, for the first time, we are facing the distinct possibility that this generation of children will live shorter lives than their parents. The Australian Government must act now to prevent such a tragic and avoidable outcome for our kids. Banning junk food advertising is one part of the puzzle," said Mr Moore.

For further information/comment:

Michael Moore, PHAA CEO

0417 249 731