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Restrictions on junk food advertising to kiddies – Senate wrong

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is appalled by the action taken by the Government and Opposition in the Senate yesterday to vote down the Greens *Protecting Children from Junk Food Advertising (Broadcast Amendment) Bill 2010*.

“There is overwhelming evidence that our children are becoming more obese and it is incumbent upon us as a society to take every action possible to support parents in dealing with the epidemic of poor nutrition and obesity,” said the CEO of the PHAA, Michael Moore.

The industry has put huge effort into persuading the government and opposition they are capable of protecting children from exposure to junk food advertising through self-regulation. “Self-regulation is a joke,” said Mr Moore. “From the time it has been adopted, sections of the industry have either ignored it or worked around it. A favourite tactic is employing sports stars to sing the praise of junk foods.”

“Restrictions on broadcast of junk food advertising during children’s viewing times is just a first step – but it is an important one and every step must be taken to protect the health of our children. There is overwhelming evidence that food that is energy-dense and nutrient poor is a major contributor to the growing incidence of childhood obesity. It is particularly important to break the nexus with sport,” said Mr Moore.

The National Preventative Health Taskforce made the following clear recommendation on this issue:

‘REDUCE EXPOSURE OF CHILDREN AND OTHERS TO MARKETING, ADVERTISING, PROMOTION AND SPONSORSHIP OF ENERGY-DENSE NUTRIENT-POOR FOODS AND BEVERAGES.’

The government response to the recommendation, below, was at the very best soft, according to Mr Moore:

‘Change is currently being achieved through a combination of Government regulation, industry self-regulation and new television initiative.’

“The government now needs to take a long hard look at the long term consequences of their reluctance. Growing levels of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and hypertension are among the consequences of doing nothing. For the first time, we are on the cusp of having the next generation expecting a shorter life span due to the exponential growth in non-communicable disease. Television advertising is just one way the junk food industry attempts to reach our kids. With the failure of this legislation what it needed is a comprehensive plan that includes restriction on all forms of marketing of junk foods to children,” concluded Mr Moore.

For further information/comment:

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