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**Public Health Association**  
AUSTRALIA

## **Burden of Disease: Poor diet higher than previously thought**

The *Australian Burden of Disease Study: impact and causes of illness and death in Australia 2011-summary report*, released on Friday by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), shows a least 31% of the burden of disease is preventable if risk factors such as diet, tobacco use, alcohol use and physical inactivity were addressed.

New analysis confirms what Australians eat is more important than previously thought. Diet is a major contributor to the Burden of Disease (BOD). According to Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) CEO, Michael Moore, "Poor diet is significantly impacting disease burden in Australia. Diet alone accounts for 7.2% of the BOD and it's no surprise really that diet is such a significant contributor to chronic disease with so few Australians eating according to the recommendation of the Australian Dietary Guidelines".

"These Guidelines advise people to enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods every day and to avoid or limit 'discretionary' foods and drinks high in saturated fat, added sugar or salt and alcohol. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has assessed dietary intake directly against dietary recommendations. They found only 4% of Australians ate enough of the nutritious food, such as fruit and vegetables, grains, lean meats and dairy foods; and a third of daily energy intake came from discretionary food and drinks."

Of real concern is that three quarters of young people aged from nine to eighteen years regularly exceed the World Health Organization's advice that the contribution of free sugars should be less than 10% of total energy intake.

"Household expenditure research by the ABS in 2014 confirms the findings that over half (58%) of consumer spending was on discretionary foods with only 15% on healthy foods such as on fruit and vegetables," says Michael Moore.

"There is an urgent need to address Australia's diet to curb preventable disease. PHAA has been pushing for strategies to protect public health by improving diet: Australia needs a sugar tax on soft drink with the income generated from the levy invested in public health initiatives promoting healthy foods for disadvantaged groups; to provide additional support for the Health Star Rating system on packaged foods; and to coordinate this with a comprehensive National Food and Nutrition Policy.

### **For further information/comment:**

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