Involvement of the Food Industry in Nutrition Policy

Policy Position Statement

Key messages:
Involvement of the private sector in policy deliberations can cause governments to base policy not on nutrition and public health effects of their products, but on wealth creation and the financial and employment potential of their companies. The food industry does not have the mandate nor the right to make decisions about what is in the public’s interest. Governments have the sole authority to regulate and carry out activities to protect and promote the general welfare, health and safety of the community.

Key policy positions:
1. The Commonwealth government should lead the development of nutrition policy, unencumbered by food industry.

2. Governments should reform the existing public private partnership approach to nutrition policy in Australia, particularly the Healthy Food Partnership which is currently a vehicle for commercial interests to undermine support for a comprehensive national nutrition policy.

3. All levels of government should be transparent and clear about donations (including political) and lobbying from corporate interests, including those of the food industry.

Audience: The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should lead the development of nutrition policy. Decision-making around nutrition policy needs to occur without the involvement of the food industry (regardless of a company’s alignment with public health nutrition goals).

Responsibility: PHAA Food and Nutrition Special Interest Group

Date adopted: 26 September 2018

Contacts: Amanda Lee and Kathryn Backholer, Co-Convenors, Food and Nutrition Special Interest Group
PHAA Position Statement on Involvement of the Food Industry in Nutrition Policy

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Policy position statement

This position statement should be read in conjunction with the Involvement of the Food Industry in Nutrition Policy background paper, which provides further supporting arguments, evidence and data.

PHAA affirms the following principles:

1. Involvement of the private sector in policy deliberations can cause governments to base policy not on nutrition and public health effects of their products but on wealth creation and the financial and employment potential of their companies.¹

2. While the food industry may contribute to and have responsibilities to society, the role of government is to govern in the public interest.² As a result they have the sole authority to regulate and carry out activities to protect and promote the general welfare, health and safety of the community, and to do what individuals alone cannot.³

3. The food industry should not have the mandate nor the right to make decisions about what is in the public’s interest.

PHAA notes the following evidence:

4. The World Health Organisation (WHO) highlights that food industry involvement in policy development and monitoring may lead to conflicts of interest. In particular, conflicts between private interests (e.g. sales growth, profit) and public health goals, which may hinder effective, evidence-based nutrition policy action.⁴

5. Another negative aspect of food industry involvement in the development of nutrition policy is the potential for it to undermine the integrity of the public health agency or organisation involved. This may decrease public trust and confidence in the agency.⁵

6. These conflicts may occur at a personal or an institutional level. A personal conflict of interest arises in circumstances where there is potential for a secondary interest to unduly influence, or where it may be perceived to unduly influence, the independence or objectivity of professional judgement or actions regarding a primary interest.⁴

7. Institutional conflict of interest describes a situation where a government’s primary interest, as reflected in its institutional mandate to protect and promote public health, may be unduly influenced by the conflicting interest of a non-State actor in a way that affects, or may reasonably be perceived to affect, the independence and objectivity of the government’s work in the area of public health nutrition.⁴
8. Conflicts of interest are more likely to happen when the core business of the external actor is related to goods that contribute to unhealthy diets (non-aligned with public health nutrition goals). ⁴

**PHAA seeks the following actions:**

9. Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should lead the development of nutrition policy, unencumbered by food industry. Decision-making around nutrition policy needs to occur without the involvement of the food industry (regardless of a company’s alignment with public health nutrition goals).

10. The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should use the WHO technical guidance on managing conflicts of interest in nutrition policy decision-making and programme implementation. ⁴

11. The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should reform the existing public private partnership approach to nutrition policy in Australia, particularly the Healthy Food Partnership which is currently a vehicle for commercial interests to undermine support for a comprehensive national nutrition policy.

12. As per international guidance ⁴, the food industry should be consulted regarding the implementation of any new nutrition policy initiatives that relate directly to the food industry. However, this process of consultation should be clear and transparent.

13. The monitoring and evaluation of nutrition policy should not involve any organisations that have a commercial interest in the outcome of the evaluation as this is a conflict of interest that cannot be managed and must be eliminated. ⁶

14. The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should be transparent and clear about political donations and lobbying. A register of food industry representative visits to Members of Parliament is needed. Furthermore, food industry should be disallowed from funding/sponsoring steering committees and groups which are developing food and nutrition policy.

**PHAA resolves to:**

15. Advocate for the above steps to be taken based on the principles in this position statement.

**ADOPTED 2018**
References


