Health Star Rating moving forward but still not stellar

The Health Star Rating (HSR) food labelling program is an important and useful tool to help people make healthier food choices, but should not be seen as the sole solution to challenges we face in promoting a healthy diet for Australians.

The HSR system has undergone a formal five-year review. The Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum for Food Regulation's August meeting agreed to move food labelling in the right direction, based on the review’s findings, but could have gone further.

The review does not support mandating the HSR being applied to all packaged food, despite leading health and consumer groups wanted it on behalf of consumers.

With only a third of all eligible products captured so far, this is a missed opportunity.

Expectations of HSR labelling on 70% of products within five years is a modest target, but with no carrots or sticks for industry, change is unlikely, otherwise it would have already occurred.

The labelling of sugars on packaged foods and drinks needs to be enacted, rather than merely reviewed. And information about the amount of added sugars needs to be considered in the calculation of the HSR.

Every day there is new research published about healthy eating, so improvements to the HSR need to be ongoing. The five-year review report recognises this and there are genuine attempts at improvements.

We strongly support the transfer of the machinery of the HSR system to Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ).

These recommendations are useful but there is still more work to be done to deliver for consumers.

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