Nation-wide kilojoule labelling needed on fast food - Media release

Implementing nation-wide menu labelling for pre-prepared food sold at takeaway outlets is just one way the Government can make it easier for Australians to put their health first.

In a submission to Food Standards Australia and New Zealand on policy guidance for menu labelling, Dietitians Australia calls for a national program to increase consistency across the country.

Depending on where you live, some may be familiar with kilojoule (energy) ratings displayed on the menus at fast food outlets, with five states and territories introducing their own menu labelling legislation since 2011.

However, in Western Australia, Tasmania and Northern Territory this type of labelling remains voluntary.

“We want everyone to have access to the right information to prioritise their health – and having consistent, nation-wide menu labelling on takeaway food would be a step in the right direction,” said Simone Austin, Senior Dietetic Advisor at Dietitians Australia.

“We encourage cooking at home where possible but eating out is a part of the Australian lifestyle.

“Food sold from takeaway outlets are often higher in energy, lower in nutrients and provided in larger portions than what Australians might usually eat at home. If eaten regularly, it can increase the risk of developing chronic disease.

“Without energy labels on menus, it makes it trickier for Australians to be able to enjoy eating out on occasion and keep their health in mind.

“Having the kilojoule content next to each item when you look up at a menu board, means that everyone would be able to easily access the same information about the food they are eating.”

However, for it to be effective, this labelling also needs to be accompanied by public health campaigns about what kilojoule content means, and examples of this can be seen in the states who had introduced their own legislation.

Simone highlights that displaying energy on menus is designed to help guide Australians, providing a numerical value to help them to assess whether a food is right for their health.

“With the National Preventive Health Strategy soon to be finalised, this is a good example of the importance of nation-wide health literacy programs to empower Australians with the skills to eat for their health,” said Simone.

If successful, the proposed policy would require food outlets (including supermarkets) selling ‘standard food items’ (food and drinks provided at a standardised portion and ingredients) to display kilojoule information, where there are 50 or more outlets nationally, 20 or more in a state or seven or more located in a territory.

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Media enquiries

For media enquiries and interviews, contact our Media Officer on 0409 661 920.

Note to editors: Dietitians Australia is the leading voice of nutrition in Australia, representing dietitians nationally and advocating for healthier communities. Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) is the only national credential recognised by the Australian Government as the quality standard for nutrition and dietetics services in Australia.