Dietitians Australia

Joint Statement Government Must Act Now to Protect Children from Junk Food Advertising

As public health leaders, we call on the Australian Government to urgently respond to the Feasibility study on options to limit unhealthy food marketing to children to protect Australian kids from harm.

The feasibility study undertaken by the University of Wollongong and the Deakin Institute for Health Transformation on behalf of the Government found that restrictions on unhealthy food and drink marketing across online platforms, television, outdoor advertising, retail settings, packaging and sponsorship were feasible, with a combination of options likely to be most effective.

Legislating comprehensive national restrictions must be a national priority and a central pillar of Australia's preventive health agenda. This means implementing laws that reduce children's exposure across all the places they live, learn, play and spend their time, including:

- television and streaming services;
- social media and online platforms;
- online gaming and digital advertising;
- sports sponsorship and promotions;
- outdoor advertising and public spaces;
- retail environments and product packaging; and
- other forms of marketing that directly or indirectly target children.

All Australian children deserve to grow up in environments that support their health and wellbeing. Instead, they are exposed to unprecedented levels of aggressive and targeted marketing by unhealthy food and beverage companies.

This relentless advertising normalises the consumption of highly processed foods and sugary drinks and undermines the efforts of parents, carers, educators and health professionals to support healthy eating habits.

Self-regulation by industry has failed. Voluntary industry codes have not adequately protected children from harmful marketing practices.

We are deeply concerned that unhealthy diets are driving increasing rates of overweight, obesity and diet-related disease among Australian children and young people, with significant long term consequences for individuals, families, communities and our health system.

The evidence for action is overwhelming. Restricting junk food advertising to children is a proven, evidence-based preventive health measure that can improve health outcomes, reduce health system costs and create healthier environments for children and families.

The National Obesity Strategy, National Preventive Health Strategy and the Parliamentary Inquiry into the State of Diabetes Mellitus in Australia all support restricting children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing across the media and settings children engage with.

Government-funded healthy eating education programs must form part of this, but education alone cannot overcome an environment saturated with junk food marketing.

The *Healthy Kids Advertising Bill*, which includes protections for children from harmful junk food advertising on TV, radio and online, alongside the Government's feasibility study and international best practice - provide a foundation for a comprehensive approach to safeguarding children's health.

Every year of delay means another generation of Australian children grows up in an environment designed to promote unhealthy choices and drive corporate profits at the expense of their health.

We know what works. The evidence is clear. Australian children deserve nothing less.