



Australian and Children's Screen Content Review

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The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is the national association of the dietetic profession with over 6000 members, and branches in each state and territory. DAA is a leader in nutrition and advocates for food and nutrition for healthier people and healthier nations. DAA appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Australian Government Department of Communications and the Arts regarding the Australian and Children's Screen Content Review.

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DAA interest in this consultation

As the leading nutrition and dietetic organisation in Australia, the Dietitians Association of Australia considers it important that:

- Australians have access to quality screen content that promotes Australian identity, culture and food, especially in the context of a healthy lifestyle; and
- Australian children have access to quality screen content which helps them understand the world around them and learn about Australian values, culture and food, especially in the context of a healthy lifestyle.

Securing quality screen content that promotes Australian identity and culture

DAA agrees that in order to achieve the policy objective of securing quality screen content that promotes Australian identity and culture, Government support (through a range of regulatory measures and incentives for the screen production industry) is imperative.

It is important that Government regulatory measures and incentives not only apply to traditional platforms and industry structures, but also to new players and intermediaries that are providing consumers with more viewing choices than ever before, such as Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) services (e.g. Stan, Netflix, Amazon Prime and Foxtel Now), user-generated content platforms (e.g. YouTube and Facebook), and online catch up television services for the commercial and national broadcasters.

DAA recommendations: As part of the Government support, DAA would like to see regulatory measures and incentives for the screen production industry put in place to encourage and increase the production of quality screen content that promotes Australian identity and culture, especially:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, customs and food, particularly those that promote a healthy lifestyle and were applied in the past, and still apply today, (e.g. bush tucker, native Australian cooking techniques, cultural dance).
- Healthy living and health-promoting behaviours in the context of the Australian lifestyle (e.g. feature a wide variety of fresh and nutritious Australian foods on screen, with people of all ages enjoying cuisine that is compatible with the Australian Dietary Guidelines¹).

Securing quality Australian screen content for children

DAA supports the policy objective of securing quality Australian screen content for children, especially content that helps Australian children understand Australian values and culture, as well as the world around them. DAA also considers it important to ensure that screen content developed for Australian children supports and encourages a healthy lifestyle and health-promoting behaviours, especially good eating habits (aligned with the Australian Dietary Guidelines) and regular physical activity.

Childhood obesity rates in Australia: Childhood obesity is a major public health concern because of its high prevalence and strong links to other health issues, such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, gastrointestinal and liver problems, greater risk of developing asthma and sleep apnoea². The percentage of overweight or obese children aged 5-17 years in Australia increased between 1995 and 2007-08 (20.9% and 24.7%, respectively) and has remained stable to 2011-12, with 1 in 4 (25.7%) children currently overweight or obese³.

In a major study in 2015, just over 7,500 NSW school students in years K, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 were surveyed as part of the NSW Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS 2015)⁴. Approximately 1 in 5 (22.9%) primary school children surveyed were found to be overweight or obese in 2015. In terms of food habits, the SPANS survey revealed 78% of children and 80% of adolescents met the daily fruit recommendations, but only 1 in 20 children (5%) and 1 in 10 adolescents (11%) ate the recommended daily serves of vegetables.

Links between obesity and TV viewing: Studies have identified an association between watching television (TV) and childhood obesity. A recent systematic review of 13 studies (representing 61,674 children aged 1-18 years) examined the association between TV viewing whilst eating and children's diet quality⁵. Of 6 studies reporting overall food habits, all found a positive association between TV viewing and the consumption of discretionary foods (e.g. pizza, fried foods, sweets and snacks). Of 8 studies looking at fruit and vegetable consumption, 7 identified a negative association with eating whilst watching TV. Four out of 5 studies identified a positive association between watching TV whilst eating and servings of sugar-sweetened beverages. Family meals did not overcome the adverse impact on diet quality of having the TV on at mealtimes. Overall, eating whilst watching television was found to be associated with poorer diet quality among children, including more frequent intakes of sugar-sweetened beverages and high-fat, high-sugar foods and fewer fruits and vegetables. The collective effect may contribute undesirable weight issues among children.

Lasting effects of TV viewing on food choices: Research has further shown that TV viewing, especially during high school, may have long-term effects on eating choices and contribute to poor eating habits in young adulthood. One study with 564 primary school students (younger cohort) and 1366 high school students (older cohort) examined the associations between TV viewing behaviour with dietary intake five years later⁶. Respondents were categorized as limited television users (less than 2 hours/day), moderately high television viewers (2-5 hours/day), and heavy television viewers (5 or more hours/day). Among the younger cohort, heavy television viewers reported lower fruit intake and higher sugar-sweetened beverage consumption than the other two groups. Among the older cohort, watching five or more hours of television per day predicted lower intakes of fruits, vegetables, whole grain and calcium-rich foods, and higher intakes of trans fat, fried foods, fast food menu items, snack products, and sugar-sweetened beverages (products commonly advertised on television) five years later.

Impact of TV program content on food choice: It is well known that TV advertising for fast food restaurants, snack foods and sugar-sweetened beverages has the potential to influence food choices, especially among children and adolescents. As for advertisements, TV programs also have the potential to negatively or positively influence food choices and eating behaviour. Research in young adults shows that program viewing may affect motivations to eat healthily and to exercise⁷. This study examined the effects of reality entertainment programming and embedded commercials on viewers' perceived motivations and efficacy to exercise and consume a healthy diet, as well as on food preference. In a 3 (program type) × 2 (advertisement type) study design, 253 female undergraduates were randomly assigned to watch an episode of a health-oriented reality program, a non-health-oriented reality program, or a health-themed sitcom in which commercials for either healthy or unhealthy foods were embedded. Results indicated that perceived realism of the health-oriented reality program generated greater confidence to eat more healthily and exercise, as well as greater motivation to exercise. Additionally, program viewing differentially affected motivations to eat healthily and to exercise, but only when type of advertisement (high vs. low calorie food ads) was taken into consideration. Finally, young women who watched the health-oriented reality program were more likely to choose a healthy snack at the conclusion of the experiment than those exposed to other programs, thus supporting the assertion that reality programming may trigger positive health behaviours.

DAA recommendations: Given the potential impact of TV viewing on dietary intake and weight status, DAA would like to see regulatory measures and incentives for the screen production industry put in place to encourage and increase the production of quality screen content for Australian children and adolescents that promotes a healthy lifestyle and health-promoting behaviours, especially:

- good eating habits (e.g. feature a wide variety of fresh and nutritious Australian foods on screen, with children and adolescents enjoying cuisine that is compatible with the Australian Dietary Guidelines¹); and
- regular physical activity for children and adolescents of all ages, in a fun and interactive way, to reinforce the Australian Government (Department of Health):
 - National Physical Activity Recommendations for Children aged 0-5 years⁸;
 - Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Children aged 5-12 years⁸;
 - Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Young People aged 13-17 years⁸.

Crocamole (on Channel 10) for pre-schoolers is a fine example of how healthy eating and physical activity can be presented on screen to young children in a fun and interactive way. Producers of Crocamole sought input from DAA to create healthy eating messages for the target audience, which helped to ensure the messages aligned with the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

References:

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