



Embargoed: 00.01am Tuesday 23 July 2019

HEALTH EXPERTS CALL FOR ACTION ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY

A coalition of health experts is calling for increased action on obesity with a new report released today highlighting almost a quarter¹ of Victorian children are overweight or obese.

[*A Healthier Start for Victorians*](#) includes eight key recommendations to the Victorian Government to tackle the childhood obesity crisis, including tougher restrictions on unhealthy food and drink advertising to children and serving healthier options in school canteens.

A statewide campaign to promote healthy food options was also amongst the recommendations from leading public health experts, supported by 23 organisations including the Obesity Policy Coalition and VicHealth.

Obesity Policy Coalition Executive Manager Jane Martin said it was critically important to protect children from the harmful influences of unhealthy food and drink companies.

“Unhealthy food and drink companies prey on vulnerable Victorian kids, spending over \$45 million in advertising which we know kids are particularly susceptible to,” Ms Martin said.

“Children and families are bombarded by unhealthy advertising and marketing and it’s damaging their health – almost a quarter of Victorian kids are overweight or obese and at risk of chronic diseases like Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

“The Victorian Government has a real opportunity to make a difference by ensuring our public spaces like train stations, schools and sports events are free from unhealthy food and drink ads.”

Ms Martin also recommended the Government adopted a statewide campaign to educate people about the importance of a healthy diet.

“A statewide campaign to educate and encourage people to eat healthy food and drinks is important to counter the overwhelming availability and promotion of unhealthy food in our society,” she said.

Schools were identified in the report as a key opportunity for Government to improve children’s health by making school canteens healthier and increasing opportunities for kids to be active during the school day.

Co-Director of Deakin University’s Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition Professor Jo Salmon said there were simple steps schools could take to help kids eat well and increase their physical activity levels.

“Almost three quarters of primary school aged kids aren’t getting enough daily physical activity to be healthy and well,” Professor Salmon said.

“We want to see schools offer more opportunities for kids to be active. This could be incorporating physical activity into classroom lessons and making sure kids are taught critical physical skills like catching and throwing.

¹ 22.6% of Victorian children are overweight or obese, ABS 2019 National Health Survey First Results 2017-18



“It’s also really important that schools support children to make healthy food choices through the school curriculum, healthy school canteens and links to the local community.

“There’s a great opportunity to make our schools places where our kids are set up for a lifetime of good health and wellbeing – we want to help them develop healthy habits right from the start.”

VicHealth Acting CEO Dr Lyn Roberts said action was needed now to protect the next generation from a lifetime of obesity and chronic disease.

“Unhealthy diets and low rates of physical activity have caused our obesity rates to soar and our kids are suffering,” Dr Roberts explained.

“Some experts believe this could be the first generation to have lower life-expectancy than their parents so it’s critical we step up our efforts in the fight against obesity.

“Our research shows Victorians are concerned about obesity with over 77 per cent supporting Government intervention to tackle the issue.

“We’re proud to have brought together the leading public health organisations to develop eight clear recommendations to Government on where they can make the greatest difference.

“The Victorian Government has demonstrated real commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of the community, including the recent announcement of banning mobile phones in public schools. We’re keen to continue working alongside Government and the community to ensure all Victorians have the opportunity to live healthy happy lives.”

A Healthier Start for Victorians has been developed by the Healthy Eating and Active Living Roundtable consisting of Cancer Council Victoria, Diabetes Victoria, Deakin University’s Institute for Health Transformation’s Global Obesity Centre and Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition, Heart Foundation, Nutrition Australia, Obesity Policy Coalition, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) and VicHealth. The report is supported by an additional 14 health and wellbeing organisations, including the Australian Medical Association Victoria, Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation and the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS).

A summary of the report including the eight key recommendations is available to download.

The full report is available at: <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/obesity-consensus>