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Big fat hole in health reform

Australia's hospitals will continue to be a hungry beast consuming resources unless restrictions on junk food advertising and taxes on unhealthy food, to combat the drivers of obesity, are addressed - according to Jane Martin, Senior Policy Adviser, Obesity Policy Coalition.

"The Health and Hospitals Reform relies on expected savings from reductions in overweight and obesity. However the Government's response to the National Preventative Health Taskforce released with the Federal Budget, fails to tackle key policy drivers that will slow this health tsunami.

"The Government has made substantial investments in obesity prevention programs, social marketing, monitoring and surveillance; however without policy changes around food pricing and marketing to create supportive environments to foster healthy living, the efforts of individuals will continue to be undermined by the unbridled promotion of cheap, available, processed food.

"New funding of sport and physical activity in the Budget is always welcome, but we know that it is important to consider both physical activity and healthy eating to address the current obesity epidemic.

"The Government's tobacco control policies are world leading; now they must turn their attention to obesity – recognising that policy is the key driver to deliver societal change and dampen demand for unhealthy food.

"In its response to the Preventative Health Taskforce report, the Government has opted to leave junk food marketing regulation in the hands of industry, failed to set meaningful targets for product reformulation and ignored the power of tax and price on food choices," said Ms Martin.

Missed opportunities for reform – policies the OPC would have liked to have seen implemented:

- Taxing unhealthy food and subsidising healthy food.
- Meaningful targets for product reformulation.
- Government regulation of junk food marketing to children.

"The obesity epidemic will only continue to grow. In under 20 years, based on current trends, nearly 75% of the Australian population will be overweight or obese. This will put increasing strain right through the health system unless we start to take preventive action now," said Ms Martin.

About the Obesity Policy Coalition

The Obesity Policy Coalition is a group of leading public health agencies who are concerned about the escalating levels of overweight and obesity, particularly in children.

The Obesity Policy Coalition partners include Diabetes Australia Victoria, The Cancer Council Victoria, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and the World Health Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention at Deakin University.



Media release

