

Reducing junk food sponsorship in sport¹

This summary outlines the key findings and insights from VicHealth's research into the considerations, challenges and benefits for sporting organisations and junk food-free sponsorship. It also discusses the experiences of three sporting organisations that do not have junk food sponsorship.

Key messages

- The Victorian community supports reduced junk food sponsorship in sport, particularly in junior and elite sport.
- Reducing junk food sponsorship can improve the public image of sport.
- It takes leadership and cooperation across all levels of sport to reduce junk food sponsorship.
- There are benefits for sports and clubs that don't choose junk food sponsors, including opportunities to increase membership, participation and other revenue.
- It is possible to find sponsorship that aligns with the goal of providing a healthy, family-friendly environment.

Current environment

High-profile relationships between junk food companies and elite sports are accepted as the status quo.

Obesity rates are rising. One in four children are currently overweight or obese, with this number expected to rise to 1 in 3 by 2025.

Exposure to junk food marketing influences children's food knowledge, attitudes, preferences and behaviours.

Australian children and adults are exposed to high levels of junk food promotion through: participating in community sport; spectating community and elite sport; ever-present sponsorship marketing and availability of junk food in sports stadiums and recreation facilities.

Junk food sponsorship of Victorian sport was estimated at approximately \$27 million in 2016.

Up to 40 per cent of children's energy intakes come from junk food and drinks.

¹ Based on 'Building the business case for junk food free sponsorship in sport' – project report for VicHealth by Centre for Sport and Social Impact, La Trobe University

Junk food-free sponsorship is feasible and offers value to sports

1. THE VICTORIAN COMMUNITY SUPPORTS RESTRICTING JUNK FOOD SPONSORSHIP OF SPORT



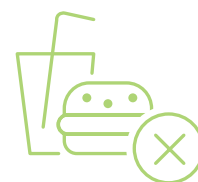
Three out of four sporting organisation members support restricting junk food sponsorship.



Two out of three say they will support this restriction, even if it means an increase in participation or attendance fees.



Nearly three out of four members say it's important to them that their sport organisation does not accept junk food sponsorship.



Research consistently shows that parents overwhelmingly support restricting junk food sponsorship of sport.

2. PARTNERING WITH NON-JUNK FOOD SPONSORS REFLECTS THE CORE VALUES OF SPORT



It sends the right message to the public about sport as an environment that is health promoting, family friendly and responsive to community sentiment.

3. REDUCING JUNK FOOD SPONSORSHIP IS A VIABLE FINANCIAL OPTION FOR SPORTS



It can help leverage other funding that might not otherwise be available.



It can facilitate community support for the sport, with opportunities to increase membership, participation and other revenue.



There are financial models and alternate sponsors that can help sports remain viable and junk food sponsor free.

4. THERE ARE MANY THINGS SPORTS CAN DO TO MOVE TOWARD JUNK FOOD-FREE SPONSORSHIP



Support their sponsorship decision-makers by helping them increase their knowledge around the impact of junk food sponsorship and the value of choosing alternate sponsors.



Develop sponsorship policies that clearly articulate their values and principles, and provide the rationale for choosing junk food-free sponsors.



Facilitate opportunities to connect with and demonstrate value to alternative sponsors, who align with their values and principles.



Consider funding models and opportunities to decrease their reliance on sponsorship revenue.



Encourage retail outlets to predominantly offer healthy foods/drinks during sporting events and at venues.²



Use all opportunities to shift attitudes of members, staff, coaches and players away from unhealthy sponsorships and towards healthy choices.



Know most of their community supports reducing junk food sponsorship in sport, and ask them for help in making the move towards it.



Work closely with all levels of leadership to reduce junk food sponsorship.

² The Victorian Government Healthy Choices policy provides guidance to sports and recreation centres to provide healthier food and drink options in their retail environments. Visit <https://heas.health.vic.gov.au/healthy-choices/guidelines>

Leadership in Victorian sport

VICHEALTH PARTNERED WITH THREE SPORTING ORGANISATIONS WHO ARE LEADING THE WAY IN JUNK FOOD FREE SPONSORSHIP:



HERE'S WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY ABOUT HOW THEY ACHIEVED JUNK FOOD-FREE SPONSORSHIP AND THE VALUE IT OFFERS SPORTS:



"The underlying principle is that we see our football clubs as having an important role in the community. And that is not only to provide fun and interaction and good health for people in the community. But also provide a healthy environment and lifestyle."



"I think we do feel we have a social responsibility, a community responsibility."



"We are very sensitive around the partners that we talk to and bring on board from a sponsorship point of view, just because of the perception and the messages that it carries through."



"I think when you talk about community messaging, and you look at all those unhealthy choices, and you look at the rate of obesity. It's a way for us to promote our sport in a healthy space."



"If you've got a suite of sponsors and partners that are aligned to your ethics and your purpose, then it becomes easier to attract other sponsors that fit into that."



"We're not just about the money. It's now talking about how we align our organisation and our objectives, in terms of participation, growing the game, how we stand in terms of the multicultural space, how we stand for impacting on the broader community....we don't want to be there and align ourselves with betting and junk food. We want to be a leader in that space."



"If you really believe, genuinely believe, that your sport has a role to play, you will need to adjust your budgets to meet that."

Time to make a change

VicHealth's vision is for all sporting organisations to create a healthy sporting environment. We want to see Victoria leading the way in tackling junk food sponsorship of sport. However, we also know this is a huge task and sports sponsorship is complex.

Junk food sponsors have been an ingrained part of our sporting landscape, and junk food is readily available in our sporting venue canteens and kiosks. Reducing junk food sponsorship raises concerns around finances, equipment and business relationships. It will also take time for leadership across all levels of sport to align on this topic. But now it is time to make a change.

Reducing junk food sponsorship in sport is a key way to limit the marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks to children, which is an important part of promoting healthy diets and preventing obesity.

Sports are uniquely positioned to offer more than just an opportunity to participate in sport – they can also play a vital part in promoting better health in their community.

For definitions and more information, please visit
www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/healthy-sport-sponsorship

For a copy of the full research report, please email
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