



Submission from Diabetes Australia to the Community Affairs Committee

**Senate Inquiry into Protecting Children from Junk Food
Advertising (Broadcasting Amendment) Bill 2008**

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Turning diabetes around

awareness | prevention | detection | management | cure

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Senate Inquiry into Protecting Children from Junk Food Advertising
(Broadcasting Amendment) Bill 2008

Dear Mr Humphery,

Diabetes Australia thanks the Community Affairs Committee for this opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into protecting children from junk food advertising in Australia.

About Diabetes Australia

Diabetes Australia is the national peak body for all types of diabetes in Australia. We have a direct relationship with almost 1,000,000 Australians with diabetes through the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) which is an Australian Government initiative providing management support for people with diabetes, their families and health professionals.

Diabetes Australia is a Federation of eight organisations covering three key groups:

- consumers;
- health professionals; and
- researchers.

Diabetes Australia is a not for profit organisation relying on support from the community and government. We are a non-party political organisation.

Position

Diabetes Australia supports the bill to protect children from junk food advertising on television during children's viewing times. There is an ever growing need to place restrictions on advertising to children in order to reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food promotion and to allow greater coverage of healthy eating messages.

Diabetes Australia affirms the following actions:

- Mandatory adherence to the Children's Television Standards (CTS) to prohibit all television advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages between 7am and 9pm every day. At the very least restrictions should apply from between 7am to 9am and 4pm to 9pm weekdays and 7am to 9pm on weekends.
- Implementation of a strict system to monitor compliance with the CTS and for applying timely and appropriate penalties for breaches.

- A comprehensive multi-sector approach comprising a collection of interventions that work together to address the multi-faceted causes of overweight and obesity in Australian society.
- Support for the National Preventative Health Taskforce proposed interventions to halting the obesity epidemic for a healthy Australia by 2020.

Background

The prevalence of type 2 diabetes is rising at an alarming rate from 1.7% of the Australian population in 1995 to 2.9% in 2004-05, this equates to 582,800 Australians.¹ This rate was based on self-reported data and does not account for those who are unaware that they have type 2 diabetes.¹ 242,000 Australians have type 2 diabetes as a result of being obese; a 137% increase from the 102,000 estimated in 2005, due in part to new AIHW estimates of the burden of diabetes attributable to obesity. It is currently estimated that 1.5 million Australians are living with diabetes and there are 694,783 people registered with type 2 diabetes on the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS).

Type 2 diabetes is a predominantly preventable disease and one of the leading risk factors for type 2 diabetes is obesity. Children are at a growing risk of developing type 2 diabetes with childhood obesity rates at an all time high with nearly one in four children aged 2-16 years overweight or obese. Obese children typically grow up to be obese adults. The habits we learn as children often stay with us through adulthood.

There are approximately 280,000 young Australians (aged 5-19 years) who are obese. There is an alarming increase of type 2 diabetes in those under 15 years old. Data from the NDSS has shown an increase in the number of children between the ages of 0-15 being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes requiring insulin. There were 50 children in 1999 registered with the Scheme that required insulin, which denotes increased severity of the condition and in 2008, 126 children were registered. This is a 39% increase. In total there are 361 children under the age of 12 years registered on the NDSS.² This figure does not take into account undiagnosed cases of type 2 diabetes.

Obesity is a worldwide epidemic associated with a variety and mix of complex causes including an increasingly sedentary lifestyle coupled with an increase in consumption of energy dense, nutrient poor foods. Obesity is a preventable and modifiable risk factor for many chronic diseases including type 2 diabetes. Diabetes Australia's response to the obesity epidemic is embedded in our vision, a world free of diabetes and in our mission, to turn diabetes around. To do this, Diabetes Australia has a simple strategy, to pursue clear objectives in five key areas of awareness, prevention, detection, management and cure.

Objectives

The objectives we pursue have a clear and significant link to the reduction of obesity in the general population. These objectives are to:

- raise awareness of the seriousness of all types of diabetes;
- reduce the incidence of diabetes;

- increase early diagnosis of diabetes;
- maximise capacity to manage and care for all types of diabetes; and
- support and promote research for a cure for diabetes

In order to raise awareness of the seriousness of all types of diabetes and reduce the incidence of diabetes, multiple strategies need to be put in place at a national level. This includes having a nationally consistent approach to restricting the broadcasting of junk food to children to protect children from the harmful effects of obesity. Junk food marketing must also be prohibited in all Australian schools and healthy food choices encouraged.

Historically, Diabetes Australia's relationship with the Australian Government has centred on diabetes management. This continues to be a strong and important focus. However, turning around the diabetes epidemic is largely dependent on successfully addressing the underlying issues of obesity which is contributing to the devastating impact of type 2 diabetes. We feel that one of the factors that can be impacted on by legislation is the regulation of broadcasting to children who are constantly faced with a barrage of marketing messages and images of high sugar, high fat, energy dense, nutrient poor foods during peak television programming times. This needs to be one of many steps taken in an attempt to take a holistic approach to combating the rise of obesity, type 2 diabetes and other chronic diseases in our society. Obese children are at a greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, dyslipidaemia and sleep apnoea.³

Television advertising and the impact on children

Food marketing directed at children can impact on their attitudes towards food and the pressure placed on parents to buy the advertised foods. Exposure to energy dense, nutrient poor food advertising such as soft drinks, confectionaries and food purchased at fast food outlets can influence a child's preferences and distort their view of healthy or appropriate food. Australian children between the age of 5 and 12 years are currently viewing on average four hours of advertisement a week. The average estimate is 9-12 food advertisements per hour with 80% of these being for energy dense, nutrient poor foods.⁴

Even though there are restrictions on the content of advertisements during C-Classified programs, they are not impacting on the nature and type of junk food advertising nor are they taking into account that a number of children are watching television at later times. For instance, 7-9pm when Children's Television and Advertising standards do not apply. This is allowing a greater level of exposure to persuasive advertising for unhealthy food options.

A survey of 919 grade five and six students from schools in Melbourne in 2007 found that television viewing and more frequent advertising were independently associated with more positive attitudes towards junk food. In addition incidences of high levels of television use were also shown to correlate with higher reported junk food consumption.⁵

Literature suggests that children are aware of advertising at a young age and are more likely to remember slogans and advertising details more so than their parents or

carers. They are also more vulnerable to the convincing nature of television advertising and only become aware of the content as their cognitive development progresses at around the age of 12 years old. This opens a very easy portal for advertising industries to reach a very susceptible audience.⁶

The Children's Television Standards⁷ stipulates that there is to be no unsuitable material shown during Children's programming hours. It especially states that no advertisement is to mislead or deceive children nor is any food product advertisement to contain misleading or incorrect information about the nutritional value of that product. However, current advertising does not prohibit the constant barrage of junk food advertising that promotes unhealthy eating which has harmful effects on a child's body weight and lifestyle.

The Australian Association of National Advertisers also adopt a code which affirms that advertising food and beverages to children should not encourage or promote an inactive lifestyle combined with unhealthy eating or drinking habits.⁸ The code acknowledges that these practices are harmful to children and yet Australia still has the characteristic of exposing its children to more television food advertising than the US, UK, New Zealand or 11 other Western countries. Australia also has one of the highest rates of childhood obesity in Western countries.⁹ Junk food advertising cannot be taken as the sole reason for the increase rate of childhood obesity, nevertheless we need to start with regulating this avenue of influence so that children are less exposed to inappropriate food and lifestyle choices.

Family and community support

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) recently received 73 submissions in response to the Children's Television Standards issues paper and 20,521 postcards from the general public calling on the ACMA to ban junk food advertising to children as part of the Cancer Council's 'Pull the Plug' campaign. This demonstrates strong community support for restrictions to be placed on junk food advertising to children. Parents especially are concerned with the level of junk food advertising and feel that it undermines their role as caregivers with increased pressure from their child to purchase the advertised item of choice.¹⁰ As a society we should be making the task for parents and carers of children easier, not creating an environment solely based on misinformed, manipulative consumerism.

Overweight and obesity has a strong genetic link. However families also share diet and lifestyle habits that may contribute to obesity. Separating the genetic influences from other causalities for obesity is often difficult but evidence shows a link between obesity and heredity. Since we know that children of overweight and obese parents are at a higher risk of being obese themselves, we need to assist and support parents and carers make selecting healthier food options for their child a much easier process. At present, due to the increasing marketing of unhealthy food and beverages, caregivers are under more pressure from their children to buy these foods that have been exposed to them on television.

In our current environment parents are spending more time at work and have less time for food purchasing and preparation as well as less time for personal physical activity.

This time poor environment makes caregivers more likely to select the easy option in the supermarket or grab some fast food for their hungry child, especially when the child is constantly demanding it. Children, especially those under the age of 12 are not aware of the purpose of the junk food advertisement. They purely enjoy the colour, movement, sound and catchy nature of the ad which is what the advertising industry knows and targets. They find children to be a lucrative demographic and deliberately target C-Programming times.¹¹ In addition, the inclusion of toys within a junk food package or promotion is a strategy the food and beverage industry has increasingly used to encourage children to try the product.

We need to assist Australian families make healthier choices easier through restricting junk food advertising on TV, showing instead, healthier lifestyle options and providing clear and accurate nutritional information on food and beverage packaging.

The advertising industry claims that it is not the TV ads themselves that are creating an obese nation. They claim it is the amount of time spent watching television that is creating the epidemic. However, one Australian study has shown that the amount of time spent on sedentary behaviours has not been affected by the introduction on the television in 1959.¹² Before television, children spent just as much time reading books, playing board games and listening to the radio as they now do watching television. One of the fundamental differences in today's society is there has been a marked increase in the availability of energy dense nutrient poor food and their heavy marketing campaigns ensure that it is selected as the food of choice by a vulnerable and naïve group of consumers.

Environment and Access

Environment strongly influences obesity. Environment includes lifestyle behaviours such as what people eat and their level of physical activity. Too often Australians eat out, consume large meals and high fat foods and put convenience ahead of nutrition. In addition, most Australians do not get enough physical activity as a result of being time poor and living in an environment where access to safe recreational areas including places to walk is limited. In many instances especially in rural and remote areas of Australia, access to fresh fruit and vegetables is problematic. Access both physically and in terms of price and choice of healthy food, is a real problem. Knowledge about non processed foods alike fruit and vegetables, their storage, preparation and cooking is low in the general population and particularly in younger people and young parents.

Our environment often does not support healthy habits. Today, more people drive to work instead of using public transport or walking, have vending machines with high kilojoules, high fat snacks. We need to address the current lack of environmental planning that is influencing our amount of activity throughout the day

Social Factors

Diabetes Australia believes that obesity is primarily a health and social issue and that the main objective of any effort by individuals, communities, non-government organisations and governments in regard to obesity, should be addressing concurrently, both the risk factors for obesity and their underlying social determinants. The social determinants of health provide avenues through which effective interventions and solutions to obesity can be found.

While we believe that the immediate risk factors for obesity lie in individual and collective behavior, we also believe that this behavior is determined significantly by factors such as the social, economic, political and cultural environment in which society is shaped and by which it functions. The media plays a significant role in shaping the preferences of people, especially regarding food and around purchasing requests and consumption. Diabetes Australia believes that changes to the advertising standards for children will have a positive effect on the weight and nutritional intake of our nations children. Marketing campaigns targeting children have led to health inequities and the development of an 'obesogenic' environment which promotes and sustains obesity.

As a solution to the obesity epidemic, Diabetes Australia believes that Australia needs to develop a cross-portfolio and multi-sector approach to prevention and early intervention, which recognises and addresses the social determinants of health that underpin obesity and other chronic diseases and their risk factors. This will require universal, as well as targeted strategies aimed at building capacity, maximising protective factors and minimising risk factors.

Restricting television advertising of junk food to children will be one initiative that can help lessen the burden of obesity and chronic disease.

Economic Burden of Obesity

The economic burden of obesity is not only significant, but evidence indicates that it is likely to get worse even if there is no further growth in the prevalence of obesity. Australia should take every step necessary to decrease the rate and exposure of unhealthy lifestyle choices including those advertised to children on TV. ¹³

Conclusion

Diabetes Australia believes that there needs to be a concerted effort from all key stakeholders, government at all levels, non-government organisations, community based agencies and their leaders to work in partnership with us to develop healthier lifestyles. This will require strategies beyond behaviourally based awareness raising campaigns focusing on physical activity and healthy eating. It will require concerted, committed and coordinated action at a systems and organisational level to address the underlying social determinants of health that cause risk factors that in turn cause chronic disease like obesity and type 2 diabetes.

Diabetes Australia believes we must deal with the obesogenic environment in this way if we are to effect any real change which is sustainable over the long term and help create an environment where healthy choices can be easier choices.

Recommendations

- Mandatory adherence to Children's Television Standards to prohibit all television advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages between 7am and 9pm every day. At the very least restrictions should apply from between 7am to 9am and 4pm to 9pm weekdays and 7am to 9pm on weekends.
- Place the interests of children and parents before the advertising industry.
- Restrict advertising of unhealthy food choices to children across all marketing mediums especially in schools.
- Introduce structured standards and consequences to breaches in advertising codes to protect children from the harmful effects of energy dense foods and beverages.
- Take a holistic multi-sector approach to combating obesity, by addressing the physical and social determinants of health.

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