

11th July 2018

Committee Secretary
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Select Committee's *Inquiry into the Obesity Epidemic in Australia*, with a focus on childhood obesity.

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is the national voice of Local Government in Australia, representing 537 councils across the nation. ALGA's President represents Local Government as a member of the Council of Australian Governments and several other ministerial councils. In structure, ALGA is a federation of State and Territory Local Government Associations. This submission should be read in conjunction with any separate submissions received from State and Territory Associations as well as individual councils.

Local governments understand the importance of healthy communities and creating spaces and places where people can be active. Many councils work in partnership with the Commonwealth, State/Territory Governments and others, and have achieved notable preventative health outcomes.

The day to day lives and experiences of Australians are shaped by the places in which they live, work and play. Local Governments are responsible for planning, building and managing many of these places. Local Governments' contribution to addressing the obesity crisis is not from a medical perspective but rather from a preventative and community based health approach.

There is a lot of research and evidence supporting the links between people's overall physical and mental health and the environments in which they live. For children this can include having safe walking routes to school, areas for passive and active recreation, the ability to purchase healthy food in their neighborhoods and places for social networks.

This submission outlines the important role that Local Governments have in preventing childhood obesity with examples of major policy and program initiatives which have been led or had major involvement by Local Government. As the level of government closest to communities, local governments are connected and responsive to the needs and aspirations of their communities.

Collectively, Australia's 537 councils employ just under 187,000 Australians and have close links with a variety of volunteer organisations. Local Government has tangible experience and value to add in promoting the wellbeing of its communities.

On a day to day basis local governments plan, build and manage passive and active recreational facilities, pedestrian and cycling facilities, road networks and locations for major services and activities. However, for local governments to go beyond these day to day preventative health measures, targeted funding towards local initiatives is required.

Local Government has shown time and time again that it is a reliable, professional and cost effective partner in rolling out Commonwealth programs. For example, the \$6.3B Roads to Recovery Program, the \$1B Regional and Local Government Community Infrastructure Program and the thousands of large and small infrastructure projects delivered as part of the National Stimulus Package in 2009 to counter the Global Financial Crisis, were delivered on time and on budget.

In summary our main recommendation to the Committee is:

- **To recognise the important role local governments have in addressing the Obesity Epidemic and in particular childhood obesity by supporting a financial package from the Federal Government of \$100m over four years to invest in a Local Government Place Based Preventative Health Fund.**

Current and previous initiatives

To promote healthy living at the community level, the Australian Government provided up to \$71.8m over four years from 2009/10 for the **Healthy Communities Initiative (HCI)** under the COAG National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health. This initiative was invaluable to Local Government to support obesity reduction initiatives by enabling local governments across Australia to deliver effective community-based physical activity and healthy eating programs and activities, to increase the capacity of local communities to promote healthy living and develop a range of policies to support healthy lifestyle behaviours.

The HCI aimed to help reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity in participating communities with a particular focus on socio-economically disadvantaged areas and adults predominantly not in the paid workforce. The initiative was comprised of four components: Local Government Area Grants, National Program Grants, a Quality Framework and registration system linked to a web-based Information Portal, and an evaluation. ALGA was involved in the development of this program.

Local Government grants accounted for \$61.5m and the program was progressively implemented over three phases with 92 grant recipients. Funds were able to be used to deliver or purchase programs and activities, provide or subsidise training and education and promote the healthy lifestyle agenda through community marketing and policy and infrastructure development. This program ceased in 2011-12. Programs like this are effective and allow councils to deliver programs and services in a cost-efficient way in partnership with the Commonwealth.

Healthy Spaces and Places was another important initiative in preventative health, improving health and wellbeing and reducing obesity. It was an effective collaboration between ALGA, the Planning Institute of Australia and the Heart Foundation with funding from the Federal Department of Health. It focused on education and practical advice in incorporating active living principles into the design of the built environment. Whilst this program has concluded the resources and materials can be found at www.healthyplaces.org.au

The COAG Health Council in collaboration with the Meeting of Sport and Recreation Ministers and ALGA has established a **Working Group (led by Victoria) to examine ways to improve food and drinks associated with children's sport and recreation**. All levels of government are working to identify levers to incentivise uptake of healthy foods and drinks. Consideration is being given to voluntary measures in the first instance. ALGA is working in partnership with the other levels of government to encourage voluntary initiatives to improve healthy food and drinks at sports facilities and events. As an owner of sport and recreation facilities, local governments play a role in the management and leasing of these facilities. In addition, work is underway to provide some best practice examples.

One of those examples is Mid-Murray Council which has developed a Sugar Free Sport Campaign. The campaign involved eight sporting clubs working with Council to develop healthy eating and sugar free food and drink policies. The Council won the Health Foundation Local Government South Australian State Award and the campaign received the regional inaugural Victorian Health Minister's Excellence in Public Health Award. Initiatives include no sugary drinks 30 minutes before, during and after sports events through to a broader healthy eating policy. Other councils ensure that free water is available at sporting facilities.

In addition for over 25 years, the **Heart Foundation Local Government Awards** recognized and showcased councils demonstrating commitment to creating healthy communities which promote positive environments and initiatives that support physical activity, healthy lifestyles and foster a sense of community connection. A summary of the 2017 Award winners is at **Attachment 1**. These Awards have now ceased.

ALGA also participates in the Food Regulation Standing Committee (FRSC) which has been directed by the Australia and New Zealand Forum on Food Regulation to prepare a **program of work to further investigate labelling approaches for providing information on sugars**, in order for consumers to have greater awareness and choice in their choice of foods. FRSC's second priority is reducing obesity and overweight.

The FRSC has recently invited submissions from stakeholders on the labelling of sugars on packaged foods and drinks. A Consultation Regulation Impact Statement has been prepared to seek information on this topic from stakeholders, including industry, public health and consumer organisations and other interested parties.

Tackling the consequences of unhealthy food and drink, reversing the impacts of overweight and obesity (particularly amongst children and young people) and promoting access and choices of healthy foods and drinks, will take coordinated partnership from all three spheres of government as well as engaging with businesses and communities.

Summary

For councils to be able to contribute significantly to this important health issue in our community, further funding assistance is critical. Shifting the health burden away from expensive medical interventions to a preventative health model is beneficial to all members of the community. Unfortunately, important health preventative initiatives such as the Healthy Communities Initiative have now ceased.

It was pleasing to see the Government's recent Budget commitment to supporting local sports facilities with \$29.7m provided in 2018-19 to deliver up to 500 local community sporting infrastructure grants of up to \$500,000 to improve community sporting facilities. ALGA understands that local governments will be eligible to apply for these grants. However, this only partly addresses the scope of potential council activities in addressing obesity.

It is important also to note that councils operate under increasingly constrained financial environments including rate capping (in some states), cost shifting of services from State/Territory Governments and increasing costs of delivering services to communities.

Preventative health is an important focus for councils across the country and has the potential to have a significant impact on community health outcomes as well as assisting in reducing obesity-related health costs. The importance of prevention initiatives is recognized in ALGA's 2018-19 Budget submission, which recommends **a financial support package from the Federal Government of \$100m over four years to invest in a Local Government Place Based Preventative Health Fund**. ALGA's analysis indicates this investment would have a cumulative Gross Domestic Product benefit by year three of \$292m and create up to 1600 new jobs.

Please contact Liz de Chastel, Senior Policy Adviser on [REDACTED] if you require further information on this issue.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Beresford-Wylie
Chief Executive Office

Summary of the 2017 winners of the Heart Foundation Local Government Awards

Yarriambiack Shire Council – Victoria (for a Council with a population under 10,000 people)

YCHANGE (Yarriambiack – Creating, Healthy Active, Nourished Generations) is a collaboration between Yarriambiack Shire Council, Rural Northwest Health (RNH), Dunmunkle Health Services (now West Wimmera Health Services) and Deakin University that seeks to identify and address the local determinants of unhealthy weight in the Shire. YCHANGE came from the Rural Northwest Health and Council's work to improve the health of residents and ensure the small rural hospital could continue to service the needs of the community. The project is working with existing community groups to make small but sustainable changes. It engaged with stakeholders to identify key leverage points where action could be led by community members at a low cost. While the project is ongoing, achievements to date include: changes to catering provided at Council and RNH meetings, YarriYak café established which sells 80% 'green' healthy coded items, improving school canteen menu options, a re-write of the kinder nutrition and active play policy, together with additional training and resources for parents and teachers, establishment of more Heart Foundation Walking groups and a regular newspaper column across multiple outlets to raise awareness.

Maranoa Regional Council – Queensland (for a Council with a population between 10,000–50,000)

In 2010, the Maranoa Council received funding from the Department of Health and Ageing under the Healthy Communities Initiative to implement Be Healthy and Safe Maranoa. The aim was to develop and implement programs focused on nutrition and physical activity, targeted at vulnerable groups, to improve the risk factors associated with chronic disease. Since 2014, this initiative has continued under sole Council management, supported by the Maranoa Community Plan 2020. The initiatives' success has been its ability to coordinate the delivery of primary healthcare activities within the region. This is attributed to the employment of a permanent Coordinator/Specialist position in Council, as well as a formal local partnership between 14 government, nongovernment, private and public agencies, with plans for ongoing extension.

City of Playford – South Australia (for a Council with a population over 50,000 people)

For the City of Playford, health and wellbeing remains an important part of its Vision. This is reflected in the strategic plan 'smart areas', underpinned by the Public Health Plan and Walking and Cycling Strategy. Council demonstrates a strong commitment to promoting healthy communities, with a large range of initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles and social connectedness – cycling and walking infrastructure upgrades, support for sporting clubs, involving children in developing playgrounds, activating public spaces, sports equipment borrowing at libraries and coordinating free healthy cooking programs for children and adults. Council is committed to role-modelling behaviours that promote health with their Healthy Food and Drink Choices policy, staff support for quitting smoking, activity based working trial and electric bikes for staff travel.