

7<sup>th</sup> May 2008

Mr James Catchpole  
Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing  
Department of the House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

JE 15/05/08

Dear James,

RE: Submission for the Inquiry into Obesity in Australia

We are pleased to accept your invitation to submit a submission that addresses all the terms of reference relating to the House of Representative's Standing Committee on Health & Ageing into Obesity in Australia.

Our submission which takes the form of a report entitled "**Australia's Future Fat Bomb: A report on the long-term consequences of Australia's expanding waistline on cardiovascular disease**" has been compiled by Preventive Cardiology at the Baker Heart Research Institute.

The submission consists of:

1. A brief summary of the objectives and key findings of our report relevant to the terms of reference specified by the Committee and;
2. A more extensive 30-page report that examines the impact of obesity in middle-aged Australians on future cardiovascular-related morbidity and mortality, as well as providing strategies for government, industry, individuals and the broader community on how to manage and prevent our current "epidemic" of obesity.

We trust that this submission will provide the Committee with evidence-based information that highlights the need to protect Australia's "heart health" by addressing the growing burden of obesity.

Yours sincerely,



**Professor Simon Stewart | PhD FESC FAHA FCSANZ**

**NHMRC Senior Research Fellow  
Professor and Head, Preventative Cardiology  
Baker Heart Research Institute  
T: 61 3 8532 1640 | F: 61 3 8532 1641 | M: 0438 302 111  
E: [simon.stewart@baker.edu.au](mailto:simon.stewart@baker.edu.au)**

## Submission for the inquiry into Obesity in Australia

### AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE 'FAT BOMB' REPORT: Summary of objectives and key findings

This report prepared by researchers and clinicians from the Baker Heart Research Institute, provides evidence of the escalating prevalence of detrimental increases in body weight status and expanding waistlines that sets the scene for serious and negative economic and social consequences in terms of cardiovascular health associated with morbidity and premature mortality in the next 20 years.

Obesity is a key risk factor and major contributor to some of Australia's most important health priorities, including cardiovascular disease (CVD), its common precursor Type 2 diabetes and a variety of cancers. As such, it represents one of our most important targets for disease prevention and protecting Australia's overall "heart health" in the medium to longer-term. The importance of addressing this health epidemic warrants its addition to the list of National Health Priorities at the Australian Health Ministers' Conference.

The report focuses on middle-aged Australians (45-64 years) given they have a higher combined prevalence of overweight/obesity when compared to other age groups and, therefore, are at greater risk of developing Type 2 diabetes and CVD. As a result they are most at risk of experiencing highly preventable cardiovascular-related hospitalisations and deaths (many of them premature deaths) relating to their excess weight over the next 20 years. In this report we provide data to describe the current epidemic and potential consequences of overweight/obese middle-aged Australians on their "heart health" using the best available research. It is within this context that this report quantifies the size and cost of our growing 'Fat Bomb'.

In response to this growing problem we report what would happen if Australia attempted to "defuse" this future 'Fat Bomb' by reducing everyone's weight by 5kg or more. We also outline some of the practical solutions that can achieve this modest target by supporting individuals and our society as a whole to reduce their waistlines and improve and protect their future heart health.

#### Key findings

- ♥ The 'Fat Bomb' is loudly ticking in Australia with around 7 out of 10 middle-aged men and 6 out of 10 middle-aged women being overweight or obese.
- ♥ Overall, around 1.5 million middle-aged Australians are currently obese and therefore at high risk of a CVD event in the longer-term.
- ♥ Based on the best available evidence, our expanded middle-aged waistlines will result in an extra 700,000 CVD-related admissions in the next 20 years.
- ♥ These highly preventable admissions will conservatively cost (in today's terms) an extra \$6 billion (\$2.9 billion in hospital costs alone) in health care.
- ♥ An estimated 123,000 men and women will die (many prematurely) from CVD over the next 20 years as a result of their excess weight.
- ♥ A simple strategy such as losing 5kg in 5 months has the potential to result in 27% to 34% fewer CVD-related hospital admissions and deaths over the next 20 years.

In summary, in support of obesity being named a National Health Priority, the individual and societal cost of not defusing our future 'Fat Bomb' in terms of excess hospital admissions, deaths and public expenditure has been clearly described in this report.