

Why isn't obesity prevention on the government's agenda?

Jane Martin
Executive Manager
 JaneMartinOPC

Royal College of Physicians Congress
Melbourne, 8th May 2017



Role of Government and Regulation in Public Health

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Of the ten most important public health achievements of the 20th century in the USA, seven are directly related to legislative interventions

- Vaccination
- Motor-vehicle safety
- Safer workplaces
- Control of infectious diseases
- Safer food hygiene standards
- Fluoridation of drinking water
- Regulation of tobacco promotion

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Ten Great Public Health Achievements: United States, 1900-1999," MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 48 (1999): 241-43.

Comprehensive Approach for Tobacco Control - Government

Possible Action by the Government

Decisive steps should be taken by the Government to curb the present rising consumption of tobacco, and especially of cigarettes. This action could be taken along the following lines (*paras. 112-119*):—

- (i) more education of the public and especially school-children concerning the hazards of smoking:
- (ii) more effective restrictions on the sale of tobacco to children:
- (iii) restriction of tobacco advertising:
- (iv) wider restriction of smoking in public places:
- (v) an increase of tax on cigarettes, perhaps with adjustment of the tax on pipe and cigar tobaccos:
- (vi) informing purchasers of the tar and nicotine content of the smoke of cigarettes:
- (vii) investigating the value of anti-smoking clinics to help those who find difficulty in giving up smoking.

Margaret Chan, Director General, WHO

The logo for the Obesity Policy Coalition, featuring the text "obesity policy coalition" in a green, lowercase, sans-serif font, enclosed within a white oval shape that is partially overlaid by a green and blue wavy graphic element.

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- Efforts to prevent non-communicable diseases go against the business interests of powerful economic operators. In my view, this is one of the biggest challenges facing health promotion.
- ... it is not just Big Tobacco anymore. Public health must also contend with Big Food, Big Soda, and Big Alcohol. All of these industries fear regulation, and protect themselves by using the same tactics.
- Not one single country has managed to turn around its obesity epidemic in all age groups. This is not a failure of individual will-power. This is a failure of political will to take on big business.

(Global Conference on Health Promotion, Helsinki, Finland 2013)

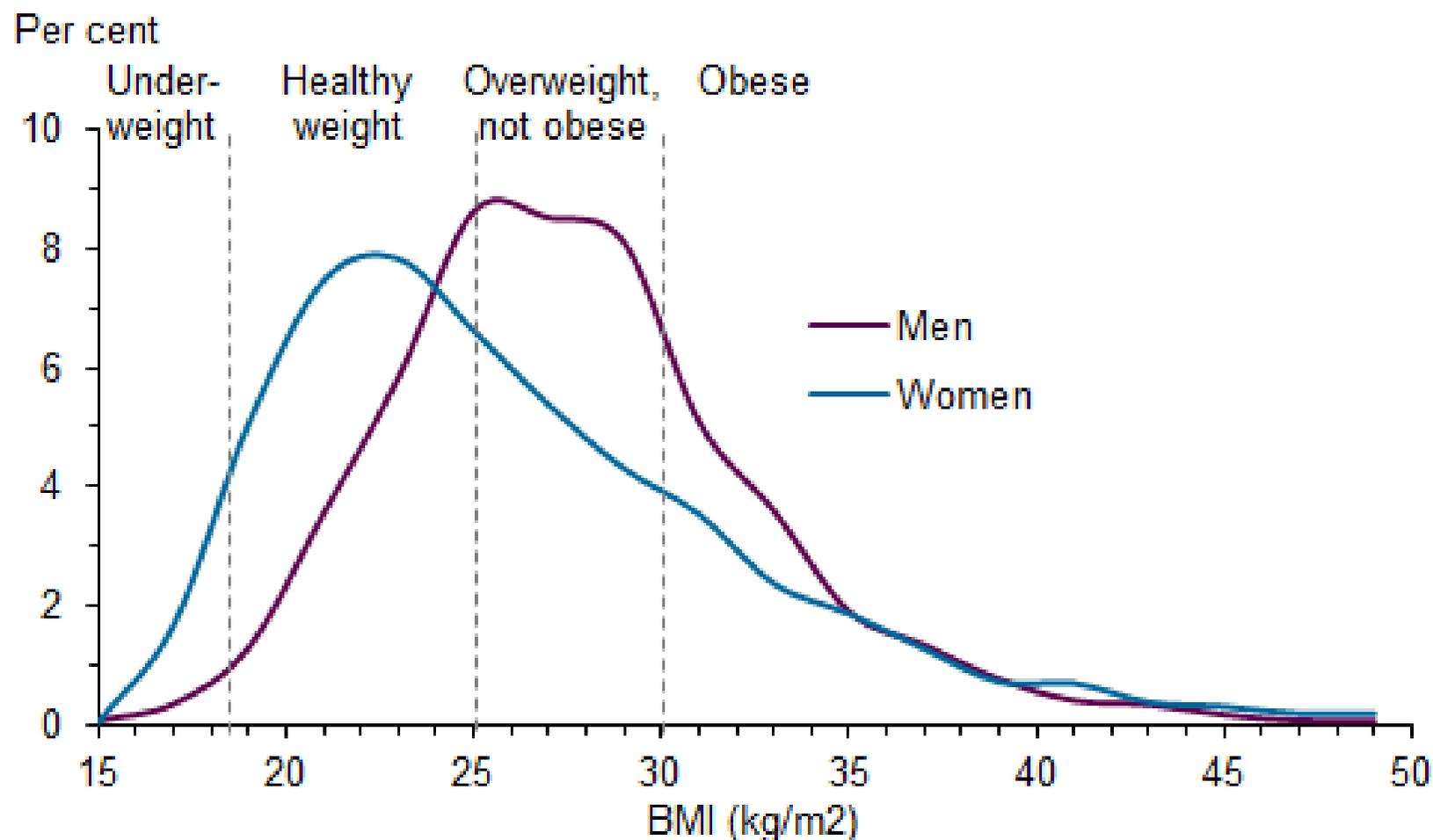
Key Policy Issues

- Prevalence and cost of chronic disease
- Including a focus on prevention as well as from acute care
- Developing and advocating the case for prevention
- Creating a sense of urgency
- Developing the research and evidence base
- Building consensus around policy response

What is the problem?

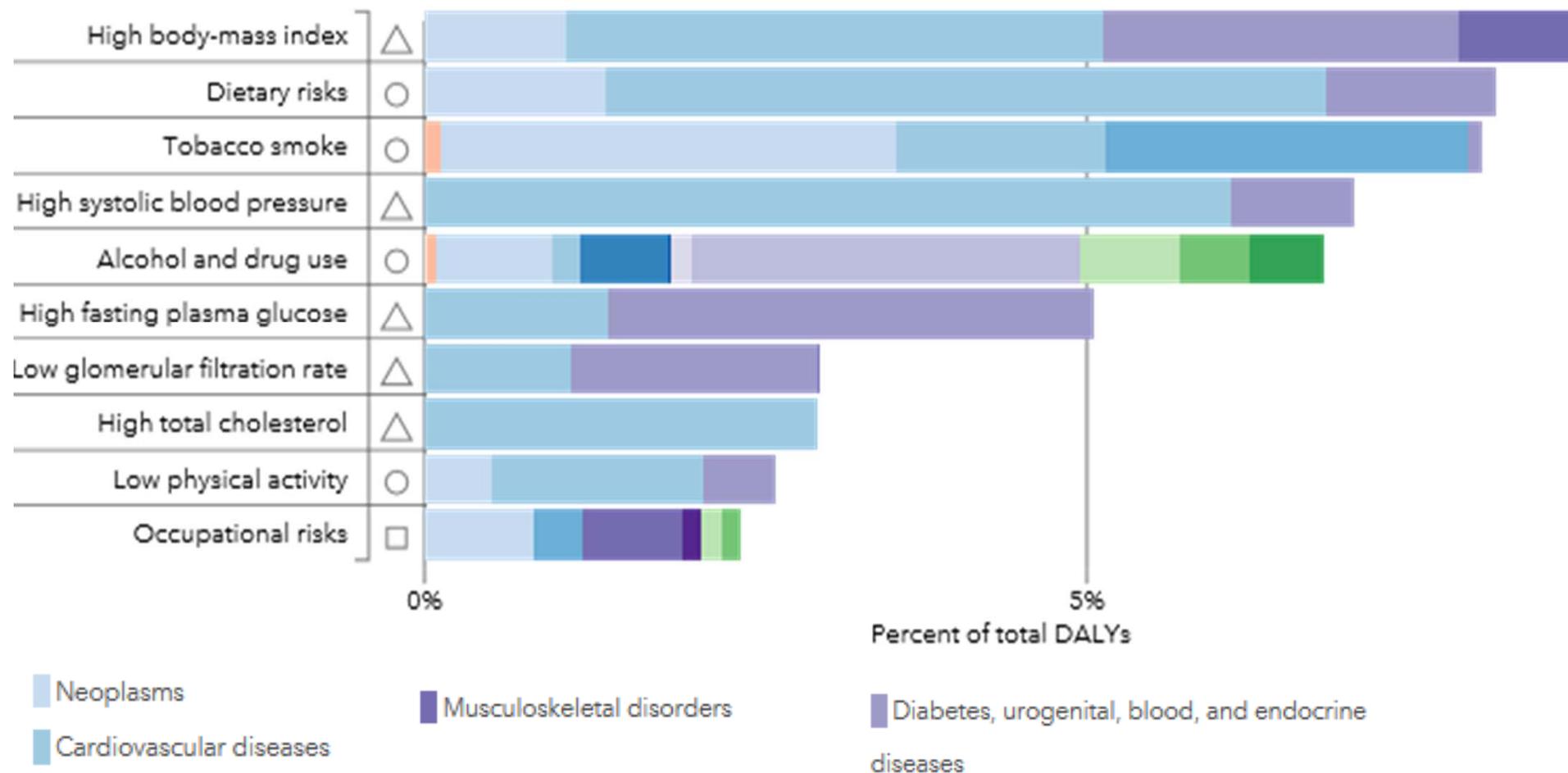
Distribution overweight/obesity Australia 2011-12

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Burden of Disease – Australia 2013

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What should be done?

Complementary approaches to prevention

Individual behaviour change



Adapted from Puska P, 2004

The environmental gradient is steep

Complementary approaches to prevention

Individual behaviour change



So, changing the gradient ...

Adapted from Puska P, 2004

Complementary
approaches to
prevention

Individual
behaviour change

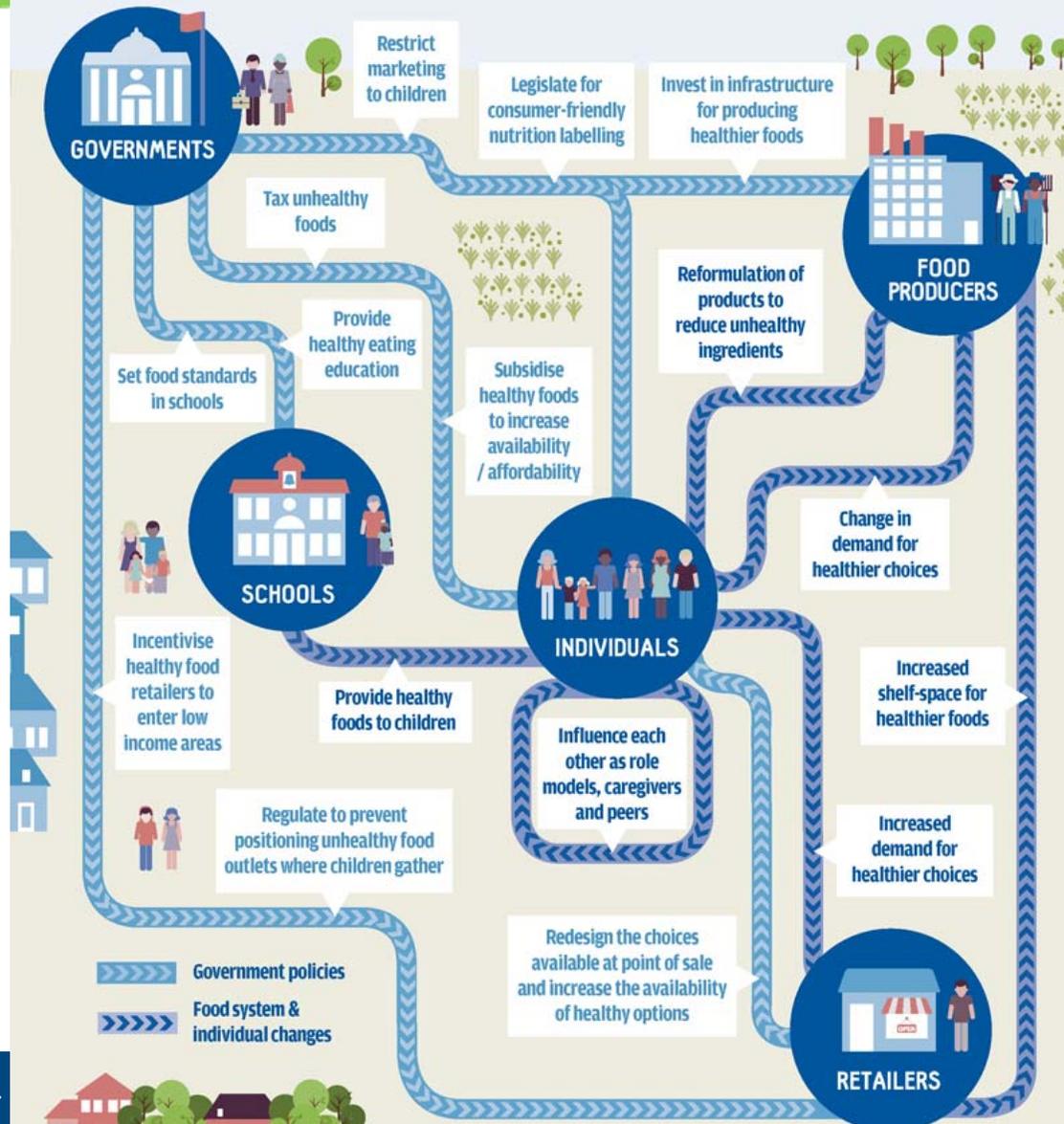


Adapted from Puska P, 2004

... will make it easier
to change behaviour

HOW CAN GOVERNMENTS SUPPORT HEALTHY FOOD PREFERENCES?

The food system is an interconnected network of producers, industry, and institutions. But at its heart is the individual. Policy can affect all parts of the network, influencing a cultural shift towards healthier food preferences.





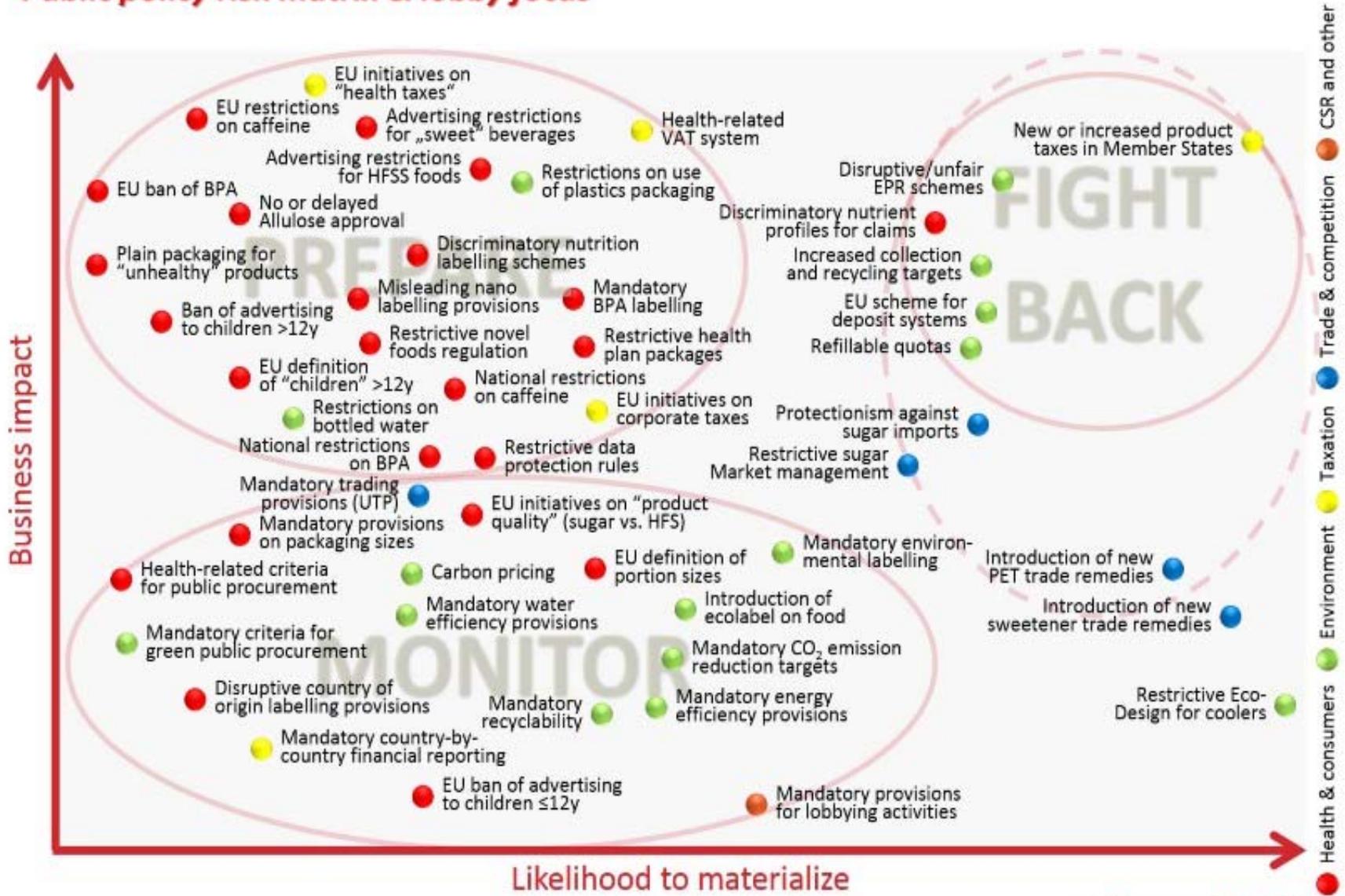
Why is progress so slow?

Barriers to Progress in Reducing Overweight and Obesity

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- Lobbying from the food industry, particularly the ultra-processed food industry
- Absence of pressure from civil society for political action
- Restricted ability or willingness of government to implement policies
- Too little empirical assessment of the effects of many programs and policies

Public policy risk matrix & lobby focus



Classified - Internal use

Opposition to Sugary Drink Tax

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INDUSTRY SEEKS CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE TO OBESITY



The Australian retail, farming, grocery and beverage sectors contribute more than \$311bn to the economy each year, and account for approximately 15% of the total workforce in Australia.

Our industries understand that obesity is a public health problem in Australia, and that it is appropriate for calls to be made for Australians to modify and improve their dietary intake.

However, it is not beneficial to blame or tax a single component of the diet.

Obesity is a serious and complex public issue with no single cause or quick-fix solution. A new tax is not the way to make our nation healthier.

The McKinsey Global Institute, for instance, classifies taxation as one of the least effective obesity interventions, with 'No direct evidence for change in weight or change in consumption or physical activity levels.'^[1]

- In fact, consumption trends show that the change such a tax seeks to effect is already happening.
- Recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data indicates a decline in added sugar intake over time, yet obesity rates continue to climb.^[2]

As a food supply sector, we recognise that we have a role to play in improving the food choices available for the Australian consumer.

We will continue to:

- Promote and support healthy balanced lifestyles that involve responsible eating habits and

As a food supply sector, we recognise that we have a role to play in improving the food choices available for the Australian consumer.

We will continue to:

- Promote and support healthy balanced lifestyles that involve responsible eating habits and regular exercise;
- Develop and provide clear and meaningful fact-based nutrition information and labelling, providing the information people need at point of purchase to make appropriate decisions for the occasion;
- Increase the availability of products with fewer kilojoules, including more reduced, low- and no-kilojoule product offerings, as well as more packaging options and smaller portion sizes;
- Ensure certain products are not marketed to children and comply with canteen guidelines;
- Support physical activity and nutrition programmes, contributing to the research and evidence base and developing partnerships that advances nutrition science;
- Defend the interests of our sugarcane farmers, who provide vital jobs and support in regional and rural Australia.

We are committed to working with public health groups, Non-Government Organisations, and government to make positive changes to the food supply into the future.

We welcome a conversation on establishing a broad and holistic approach to tackling obesity.

Shifting responsibility away from corporations to individuals

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- Framing the issue as a problem for the individual/parent

home > australia

Barnaby Joyce

Barnaby Joyce tells voters to 'stop eating so much' in attack on sugar tax

Deputy prime minister rejects Grattan Institute's suggestion and says tax office 'is not going to save your health'

Melissa Davey

@MelissaLDavey

Wednesday 23 November 2016 12.25 AEDT



This article is 1 month old

1,687 395



Barnaby Joyce on a sugar tax: 'If you want to lose weight, eat less'

Australia has an obesity problem because "people are sitting on their backside too much and eating too much food", the deputy prime minister, [Barnaby Joyce](#), has said.

Joyce offered up some weight loss advice in response to a [report from the Grattan Institute](#) launched on Wednesday that calls for the federal government to introduce an excise tax of 40c per 100 grams of sugar in beverages to combat growing obesity-related healthcare costs.

The price of a two-litre bottle of soft drink would rise by about 80c under the tax, Grattan estimates, and it would raise about \$500m a year.

Asked about the proposal, Joyce responded that people should take personal responsibility for their health rather than rely on government interventions.

"The Australian Taxation Office is not going to save your health," he told reporters in Canberra. "Do not go to the ATO as opposed to going to your doctor or putting on a pair of sand shoes and walking around the block.

"The ATO is not a better solution than jumping in the pool and going for a swim. The ATO is not a better solution than reducing your portion size. So get yourself a robust chair and a heavy table and, halfway through the meal, put both hands on the table and just push back. That will help you lose weight."



Australia should introduce 40 cent sugar tax on sweetened drinks - Grattan report

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**MAKE
HEALTHY
NORMAL**

HOME

FINDING A NEW NORMAL

FOOD

ACTIVITY

LOGIN

SIGN UP



OVER HALF THE ADULTS IN NSW ARE OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE. LET'S CREATE A HEALTHIER NSW

8,341 REGISTRATIONS



MAKE HEALTHY NORMAL

With over half the adults in NSW overweight or obese, we are living in an environment where being unhealthy has become normal. Just a handful of belly fat increases risk of heart disease, cancer, stroke and type 2 diabetes.

The good news? It's never too late to make a change. We need to change normal. We need to make healthy normal.

TAKE THE QUIZ

▶ THE PROBLEM

▶ THE SOLUTION



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Our Top Tips to
LIVELIGHTER
▲
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



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Mexican mince -
nachos style
[See Recipe](#)

How much sugar do you drink? Try our calculator



Start to live a healthier lifestyle



What is toxic fat?



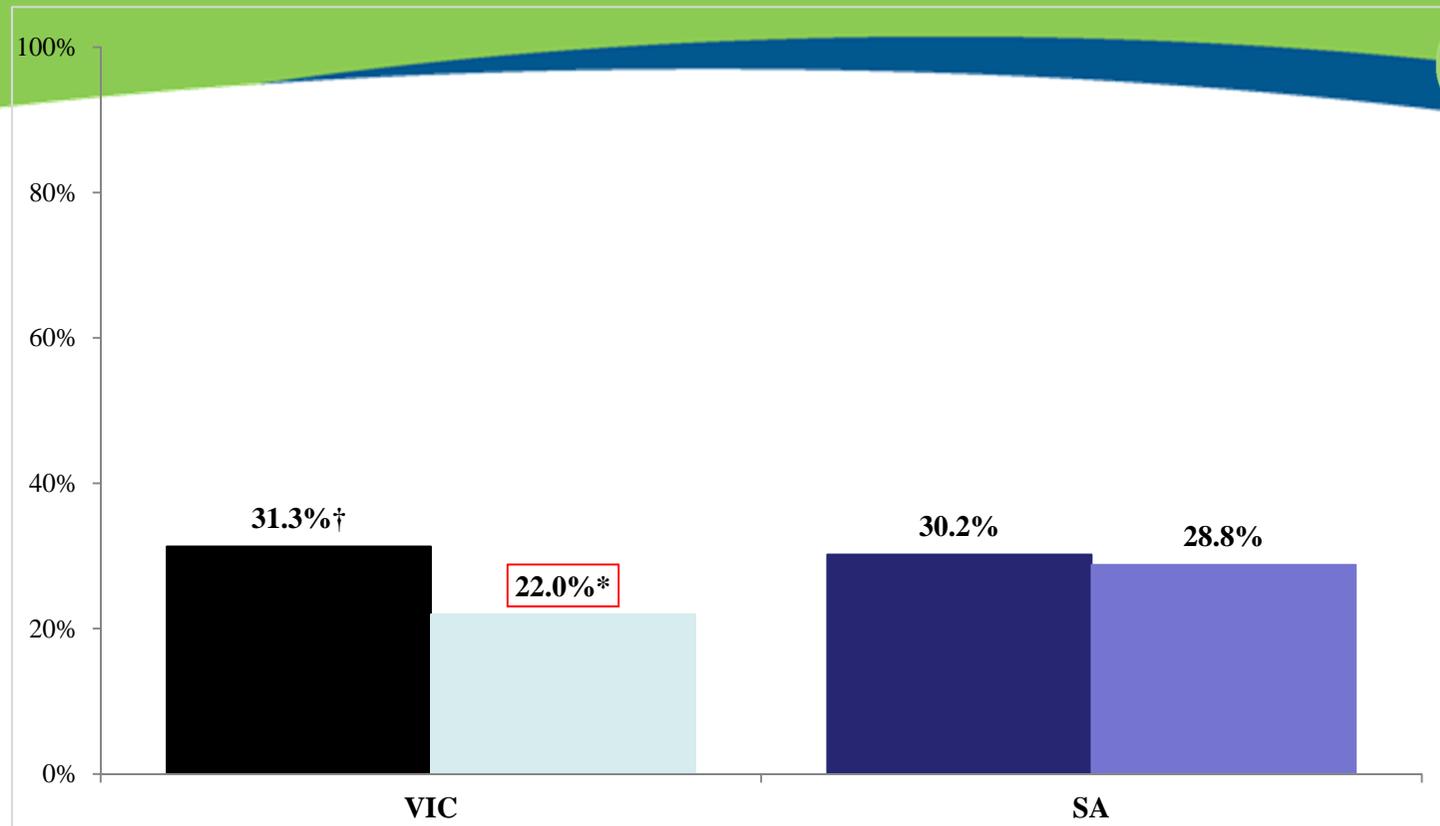
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Sugary Drink Consumption (N=2,786)

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NOTE: *Significant difference at $p < 0.05$ compared to reference category (†).

Significant reduction in frequent (4+ cups p/wk) sugary drink consumption among Victorian adults.

Confidential – not for circulation



SUGARY DRINKS DON'T BELONG IN SPORT

Our athletes don't fuel their bodies with sugary soft drinks, neither should you. With almost two in three Aussie adults overweight or obese, it's time to question junk food sponsorship of sport.



What does civil society think about government policy?

Health Public Policy

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Public opinion on food-related obesity prevention policy initiatives



Mums want fat tax

CUT BACK ON JUNK

- 71% want tax on junk food if it subsidises healthy food
- 87% want laws to cut fat, sugar and salt in processed foods
- 69% want a tax on soft drink only
- 86% want restrictions on the use of toys and giveaways
- 71% want restrictions on sponsorship of kids' sports
- 93% want restrictions on marketing unhealthy food in kids' magazines
- 84% want KJ labelling on menu boards
- 92% want advertising restricted on free-to-air TV

Healthy appetites: Sarah Pic, who never feeds son Tom, 2, junk food or soft drinks, would be happy for a tax on unhealthy foods. Picture: BEN SWINNERTON

Call to cut ads and update packaging

Herald Sun 3/8/2012

Today: Wed 15 Aug 2012 [Register 8](#)

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Food 'traffic light' labels supported by Aussies

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Aussies support junk food crackdown: study

Consensus Prevention Manifesto

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1. Make the Health Star Rating System mandatory by July 2019.
2. Legislate to implement time-based restrictions on exposure of children (under 16 years of age) to unhealthy food and drink marketing on free to air television up to 9:30 pm.
3. Set clear reformulation targets for food manufacturers, retailers and caterers with established time periods and regulation to assist compliance if not met.
4. Federal government to place a health levy on sugary drinks to increase the price by 20%.
5. Develop and fund a comprehensive national active travel strategy to promote walking, cycling and use of public transport.
6. Fund high impact, sustained public education campaigns to improve attitudes and behaviours around diet, physical activity and sedentary behaviour.
7. Establish obesity prevention as a national priority, with a national taskforce, sustained funding, regular and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of key measures and regular reporting around targets.
8. Develop, support, update and monitor comprehensive and consistent diet, physical activity and weight management national guidelines.

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UK must get tough on childhood obesity, says top doctors

Obesity Health Alliance issues 10-point action plan in hope of influencing party manifestos for general election




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Denis Campbell Health policy editor

Friday 5 May 2017 07.01 AEST



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Jane.Martin@cancervic.org.au

www.opc.org.au

 JaneMartinOPC



WHO Collaborating Centre
for Obesity Prevention