



Future-proofing the healthcare system

It's time to act on childhood obesity

The growing rate of obesity in Australia is a serious concern. Obesity is associated with a range of health problems, including many non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes and high blood pressure.

Physicians and paediatricians see patients and families who struggle with obesity and related conditions every day. We understand that these conditions are influenced by unhealthy diets and low physical activity driven by our obesogenic environment.¹

People with obesity are entitled to the same standard of care as other Australians. Unfortunately, this is often not the case and stigmatisation of these patients only exacerbates the issue.


One quarter
of Australian children
are now overweight or
living with obesity.


Since 2012
the proportion of children
with obesity has
increased by 60%
which means an additional
24,500 children each year
are living with obesity.

Kids with obesity are **five times more likely to become obese adults** and when obesity is experienced earlier in life, children grow up to face greater health risks, mental health challenges and increased mortality.

“ If we don't act now, we may be condemning a generation of children to serious preventable illness and early death. ”

– Professor Louise Baur, RACP Fellow and Professor of Child and Adolescent Health at the University of Sydney

Prevention and treatment of obesity must be urgent priorities for the Australian Government. The Royal Australasian College of Physicians calls on the Government to prioritise obesity by:



1. Implementing an effective tax on sugar-sweetened beverages to reduce consumption, using the revenue to facilitate access to healthy diets and enhance health equity



4. Allocating funding to the development, implementation, updating and monitoring of comprehensive and consistent national guidelines on diet, physical activity and weight management



2. Committing appropriate funding to develop and implement a national strategy on obesity including a focus on early childhood



5. Introducing regulations to restrict the advertising and marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children and young people



3. Establishing a national taskforce including sustained funding, regular and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of key measures and regular reporting on targets



6. Revising the nutrient profile algorithm of the Health Star Rating system to give stronger weight to sugar content and making the labelling mandatory

¹ An obesogenic environment describes the sum of influences that the surroundings, opportunities or conditions of life have on promoting obesity in individuals or populations.

A national obesity strategy is long overdue

A national obesity strategy must be comprehensive, evidence based and involve all jurisdictions. It must address a range of factors including challenging and changing societal and cultural norms; food and physical activity environments; the availability,

affordability and marketing of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods and beverages; individual behaviours; biological factors and others. The strategy should be whole-of-government, robustly designed and appropriately and consistently funded.

A levy on sugary drinks hits the sweet spot for cost-effective interventions

Sugary drinks have been directly linked to weight gain and obesity. Many countries including Mexico, France and Belgium have implemented a tax on sugary drinks while the UK, Ireland and Portugal rolled out a tax in 2018. The evidence to date has shown that taxes on sugary drinks are a promising cost-effective

mechanism to reduce consumption of these drinks and encourage manufacturers to reformulate their products. Revenue generated by a sugar-sweetened beverage tax would be used to facilitate access to healthy diets, culturally relevant community initiatives and to improve health equity.



Advertising junk food is an unhealthy influence on our kids

The widespread advertising and marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks are strongly linked to high child obesity rates. From an early age, children's exposure to advertising influences their preferences, purchasing and consumption patterns and their diet-related knowledge and health. A national ban on children

and young people's exposure to junk food and drink advertising will minimise the promotion of unhealthy diets to the most vulnerable members of our society. Restrictions on unhealthy food and drink advertising to kids must encompass all channels, including traditional media and digital and online environments.

It's time to make childhood obesity a national priority

Facts and statistics in this document are sourced from the RACP Position Statement: Action to prevent obesity and reduce its impact across the life course, the accompanying Evidence Report and recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.