

Joint Statement on Protecting Children from Unhealthy Food and Drink Advertising on State-owned Assets

7 September 2020

The undersigned public health and medical organisations support an immediate ban on advertising of unhealthy food and drinks on State-owned assets, with no exceptions.

Priority for removal should be given to public transport and public transport waiting areas, children's sporting events, and venues where families gather; but should also include facilities and settings that fall under State and Local government jurisdiction such as hospitals, museums, schools, sports facilities and healthcare services.

This statement is in line with the recommendations made in the WA Health Promotion Strategic Framework 2017-2021¹, the WA Preventive Health Summit 2019 Summary Report², the Final Report of the Sustainable Health Review 2019³, the Food Policy Index Progress Update 2019⁴ and the World Health Organization's Set of Recommendations on the marketing of Foods and Non-Alcoholic beverages to Children⁵.

The WA Government has shown strong leadership in keeping Western Australians safe from the health and economic impact of COVID-19. International evidence has emerged that indicates that overweight and obesity may be a risk factor for becoming seriously ill with COVID-19.

The need for action on halting the rise in overweight and obesity is more urgent than ever.



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BACKGROUND TO JOINT STATEMENT

International reviews of large studies have concluded that food marketing has an influence on children's nutrition knowledge, preferences, purchase behaviour, consumption patterns and diet-related health. The recommendations from these studies have been to implement policies which restrict or prohibit unhealthy food and drink promotions to children. Recent data from the World Cancer Research Fund showed children's exposure to unhealthy advertising is directly linked to an increase in energy (kilojoule) consumption, which illustrates the strength of advertising on influencing food choices.

Companies are currently using Western Australian government property as a mechanism to market and boost sales of unhealthy food, alcohol and drinks. While this may be good for industry profits, it's bad for the rest of us.

There are serious health and social costs to Western Australians associated with their consumption. Advertising these products should be prohibited on State-owned assets, to support broader obesity prevention and alcohol-related harm strategies.

Further evidence informing our position at this time includes:

- Outdoor advertising is a powerful form of food marketing around metropolitan schools, with 74% of outdoor food advertising within 500m of Perth schools being for unhealthy (non-core) foods. Perth primary schools were found to have an average of 25 outdoor food advertisements within 500m of the school boundary, secondary schools had 22 and K-12 schools had 41⁶.
- Of concern is new evidence that Perth schools located in disadvantaged areas have a significantly higher proportion of total food ads, unhealthy food ads and alcohol ads (but not healthy food ads) within 250m compared to schools located in more advantaged areas⁷.
- State revenue from total food advertising on Department of Transport sites is \$1 million per year⁸. Policies to remove unhealthy food advertising implemented in other states and international jurisdictions have not had a negative impact on government revenue which has either remained stable^{9,10}, or increased¹¹.
- Only placing controls on unhealthy food and drink advertising around schools will be ineffective given the exposure children experience on their whole school journey, including school buses, as well as exposure at other community and sporting events that attract children^{12,13,14}.
- The COAG Health Council National interim guide to reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food and drink promotion¹⁵ was developed specifically to outline what food and drinks were unhealthy and should not be advertised in government settings.
- By 2026, the cost to the WA health system from obesity related hospital admissions are estimated to reach \$610 million a year if the state cannot halt the rise of obesity.

Contact **ObesityPolicy@cancerwa.asn.au** for any queries.

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2. <https://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/-/media/Files/HealthyWA/New/WA-Preventive-Health-Summit/Summary-report-key-themes.pdf>
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5. <https://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/publications/recsmarketing/en/>
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15. <https://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Portals/0/National%20Interim%20Guide%20to%20Reduce%20Children%27s%20Exposure%20to%20Unhealthy%20Food%20and%20Drink%20Promotion.pdf>