

# **Junk food in sport: it's just not cricket.**

How much KFC branding are children exposed to as part of the Cricket Australia KFC Big Bash League, and what does the Western Australian community think about junk food sponsorship in sport?

**February 2023**



# Executive summary.



Sport at all levels has immense potential to positively impact our health. It is part of our Australian culture and role models our shared values of comradery, fairness and living a healthy, active lifestyle.

Sadly though, Australian sport is being used as an advertising strategy by unhealthy industries to sell products and embed these products within our sporting culture. The passion, excitement and loyalty we feel towards sport and our teams is why sponsoring sport is such an appealing and effective type of advertising; because we might share some of this sentiment with the sponsor. As a result, sport at all levels is wallpapered by brands for ultra-processed junk food and drinks, alcohol and gambling.

**Junk food and drinks are ultra-processed and packed full of cheap ingredients such as added salt, sugar and fat. These foods are aggressively marketed and highly profitable for the food industry but are harmful to our health. This category of food and drinks is referred to as 'junk foods' within this report.**

Historically, Australian sport was used by tobacco companies to promote their brands and shape positive community attitudes towards tobacco use. This was unacceptable, given the devastating impact tobacco has on our families as the number one contributor to the burden of disease and death in Australia. In response, governments at all levels created standards for where and how tobacco was allowed to be advertised. As a result, sport's relationship with tobacco companies ended in 1996.<sup>1</sup>

Urgent action is now needed to improve Australian diets. Having overweight or obesity is now almost equal to tobacco use in contributing to the most preventable burden of disease and death in Australia, closely followed by poor diet and alcohol use.<sup>2</sup> With over half (52 per cent) of Australians living with a chronic illness, and cancer and cardiovascular disease among the top three disease groups, it's time to turn our attention to the uncomfortable relationship Australian sport has with junk food, packed full of cheap ingredients that are harmful to our health.

There are very few controls on how junk food is marketed in Australia, and voluntary industry codes have failed to protect children and young people from exposure to industry marketing tactics. The loopholes in protecting children from junk food advertising exposure while watching sport include sport broadcasts often during children's TV viewing hours and advertisers only using brand logos, rather than specific food or drinks. This junk food advertising targets children watching sport via the player's uniforms, score boards and in the commentary box. It extends to social media with sponsored posts, videos and challenges featuring professional players. Junk food companies aggressively target children through to their local sporting clubs. Even purchasing the official merchandise turns children and young people into walking billboards for junk food.

Cricket is widely regarded as Australia's national summer sport, however due to Cricket Australia's long-standing relationship with KFC, most notably naming rights to the KFC Big Bash League, it also means an onslaught of KFC advertising and branding across our screens. As fans headed into the summer of 2021-22 eagerly anticipating the start of the cricket season, Cancer Council WA set out to quantify how much KFC advertising families are exposed to while watching cricket (particularly Cricket Australia's KFC Big Bash League) and find out what the Western Australian community thought about junk food in sport.

## Key findings.

During the 2021-22 KFC Big Bash League cricket final, KFC advertising was visible during **40 per cent of the broadcast**, with **over one-third** of this from multiple advertising exposures on screen.



Overall, during this event, KFC marketing and branding was visible

**13 times**

more than healthy brand marketing.

**81 per cent**

of our survey respondents agreed **“sport is no place for marketing junk food and drink to children”**.

**75 per cent**

of parents agreed **“junk food and drink marketing in sport makes it harder for them to feed their children a healthy diet”**.

**77 per cent**

of parents think **“the marketing of junk food and drink in sport makes it more likely that children will pester their parents for junk food and drink products”**.

**The current advertising regulations are not effective in protecting children from junk food advertising while watching sport.**

**“Sports stars are heroes in the eyes of young children, but they wouldn’t eat the food they are promoting”**.

Australian children should be able to play and watch sport in an environment that supports and promotes their wellbeing. Sport has huge potential to positively influence our health. Instead, watching sport means being bombarded by advertising for junk food, undermining families’ efforts to provide and promote a healthy diet.

It’s time for governments, sporting organisations and broadcasters to put people before profits and introduce stricter standards around junk food marketing in sport, especially to children.

*Note: References to cricket sponsorship throughout this report are in relation to Cricket Australia and the KFC Big Bash League. The Western Australian Cricket Association is not involved with, and does not take any sponsorship money from, harmful industries. See page 21.*



# Background.



## Urgent action is needed to improve Australian diets.

Poor diets and having overweight and obesity are leading causes of preventable death and disease in Australia.<sup>2</sup> Good nutrition is essential for children's growth and development, yet the availability and marketing of unhealthy food and drinks means junk foods, packed full of cheap ingredients such as salt and sugar, dominate children's diets.<sup>3</sup>

### Children aged 9-13 years consume:

39 per cent

of their total energy intake from junk foods.

13

teaspoons (free sugar) per day.



### Children aged 14-18 years consume:

41 per cent

of their total energy intake from junk foods.

18

teaspoons (free sugar) per day.



Poor diets and living with overweight and obesity are significant risk factors for a range of serious health issues, including coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes and several types of cancer<sup>4</sup> which are among the leading causes of disease in Australia.

The proportion of Australians living with overweight or obesity continues to rise in all age groups. Between 1995 to 2017, the proportion of the population living with overweight and obesity rose from 57 per cent to 67 per cent in adults, and from 20 per cent to 25 per cent in children aged 5-17.<sup>5</sup> Living with obesity is accounting for the majority of this growth, increasing from 19 per cent to 31 per cent in adults, and from 4.9 per cent to 8.1 per cent in children over this period.<sup>5</sup>

This rising trajectory is having significant and increasing health, social and economic costs. Nationally, overweight and obesity is the most expensive risk factor in health care spending, costing approximately nine billion dollars per year.<sup>6</sup> In Western Australia, overweight and obesity is expected to cost the health system \$610.1 million by 2026; an increase of 60 per cent from 2016 (\$338.7 million).<sup>7</sup> These figures are only direct costs arising from healthcare and would be much higher if indirect costs were considered, such as absenteeism and presenteeism at work, disability, workers compensation and premature mortality.<sup>8</sup>

## **Children are being targeted by the junk food industry.**

Junk food advertising is the wallpaper in our children's lives; it is online when they are connecting with friends, on the bus as they travel to school, and during ad breaks while watching TV with their family. Evidence clearly shows that junk food advertising exposure is a major determinant of children's preferences, intentions and consumption of junk food and drinks.<sup>9</sup>

Sponsoring of community events and sport, from junior clubs (which are often cash strapped) to professional leagues, is a strategy used by junk food companies to promote their brand, particularly to children. By giving away rewards at sport or community workshops for a free meal full of fat, added salt and sugar, or providing money to junior clubs in exchange for their brand's logo on children's uniforms and equipment, sponsors are building early brand awareness and loyalty in children.

## **Junk food companies are the biggest sponsors of Australian sport.**

Sponsorship of sport is an appealing advertising strategy for junk food companies due to its broad reach and ability to generate goodwill in the community by supporting our valued community events. Capitalising on excitement and emotional attachment, junk food companies benefit from 'image transfer', where the values and associations of the activity are transferred to the sponsor.<sup>10</sup> A 2015 study found that junk food companies were the most common sport sponsor in Australia, followed by alcohol and gambling companies.<sup>11</sup>

This insidious strategy of aligning with Australian sport creates an uneven playing field, especially when it comes to children and our attempts to eat well. Children are impressionable, look up to sports stars, do not yet have the capacity to critically evaluate healthy eating decisions or distinguish advertising from programming, and are developing habits they will likely carry into their adult life. It is suggested that 'by partnering with junior sporting clubs, food companies exploit children's vulnerability'.<sup>12</sup> Another Australian study found that 69 per cent of children thought food and beverage sponsors of their own sporting clubs were 'cool', and 59 per cent want to buy their sponsor's products.<sup>13</sup>

## Cricket Australia's partnership with KFC.

Cricket is regarded as the national summer sport in Australia, one of our most popular sports, with a total of 1.77 million participants (approximately one million children) in organised programs in 2019–2020.<sup>14</sup> In terms of TV viewers, more than one million people on average watch the Australian men's cricket team and the men's Big Bash League (BBL) at any one time<sup>14</sup> and there are over one million followers of the BBL Instagram account.

The BBL is an Australian cricket tournament where eight teams across Australia play a series of matches of 20 overs each. It is now regarded as one of the most watched cricket competitions worldwide with an increasing number of international star players.<sup>15</sup> The BBL has been sponsored with naming rights by KFC since its inception (2011), with KFC having a partnership with Cricket Australia for the last 17 years. This has resulted in 4.2 million Australians, equivalent to 21 per cent of the Australian population aged 14 or older, associating KFC with the men's BBL.<sup>16</sup>

This sponsorship with Cricket Australia generates enormous brand exposure and provides an unlimited opportunity to develop complementary brand and marketing executions affiliated with our passion and excitement for watching cricket.

## How is junk food advertising regulated in Australia?

The marketing of food and drinks in Australia is regulated by the Australian Association of National Advertisers (an advertising industry association), which has developed its own code of practice. It operates using a self-regulation system, meaning there is a set of 'rules and principles' which 'guide best practice', as well as a system to address complaints from consumers. Under this voluntary industry code, advertising (including sponsorship advertising) of occasional food or beverage products must not target children, and sponsorship advertising that targets children must not show occasional food or beverage products or such product packaging. However, as the advertising code is voluntary, there is no obligation for advertisers to comply. The system relies on members of the public making complaints, is complex and time consuming, and has a history of failing to uphold complaints.<sup>17</sup>



# What did we do?



## Part 1:

### We quantified the exposure of KFC brand promotion during the KFC BBL cricket final 2021-22

Cancer Council WA measured the type and extent of KFC brand and product promotion during the KFC BBL cricket final 2021-22 as broadcast in the Perth metropolitan region. We focused our efforts on KFC due to its sponsorship and naming rights of the tournament.

The measurement commenced with the start of play and ceased at the end of the game with the fall of the final wicket. The in-game footage was paused second-by-second and evaluated for marketing visible on screen; where a logo was clearly visible it was recorded if it was equivalent to one second of broadcast time. The length of time that KFC was visible was recorded and compared to the total in-game broadcast time. This same method was applied to commercial break time.

Promotion categories included fixed advertising (e.g. banners on pitch), dynamic advertising (electronic sites which changed content), integrated advertising (e.g. 'framing' the broadcast view), branded objects (stumps, uniforms, KFC bucket hats) and commercial break advertising.

## Part 2:

### We ran a digital campaign and surveyed the community to find out their thoughts on junk food sport sponsorship during the Australian summer cricket season.

Cancer Council WA ran a digital campaign from 12 December 2021 – 30 January 2022 to coincide with the Australian cricket season.

The 'Let's Get Junk Food Out of Cricket' campaign displayed digital advertisements encouraging Western Australian adults to consider the uncomfortable relationship between major junk food companies and professional sports, as well as prompt their participation in an online survey. The methodology for this research was adapted from a 2021 UK report and survey.<sup>18</sup>

**Example of sponsored digital advertisement for the "Lets Get Junk Food Out of Cricket" campaign, which invited people to take part in our survey when viewing the campaign materials shown below.**



The survey included both a quantitative and qualitative component. The first asked participants to rate their agreement to statements using a Likert scale (strongly agree/ agree/ disagree/ strongly disagree/ neither agree or disagree/ other). Responses of 'agree' or 'strongly agree' were combined to represent overall agreement to the statement. The second component at the conclusion of the survey encouraged respondents to share any further comments on the topic, asking them to 'think about any challenges it brings up for you and other parents'. These comments were then analysed to form themes.

## Part 3:

### We made a complaint to Ad Standards, regarding marketing material as part of the BBL partnership with KFC

During the analysis of the KFC brand exposure during the KFC BBL cricket final, Cancer Council WA uncovered marketing material which we considered to be against the Food and Beverage Advertising Code. A complaint was made to Ad Standards to assess the current self-regulatory system's ability to respond to examples of junk food marketing to children.

# What did we learn?

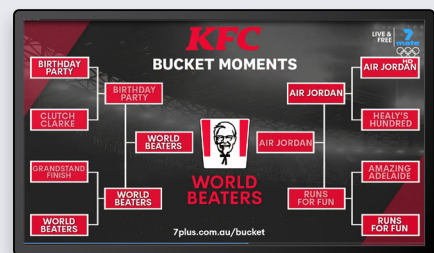
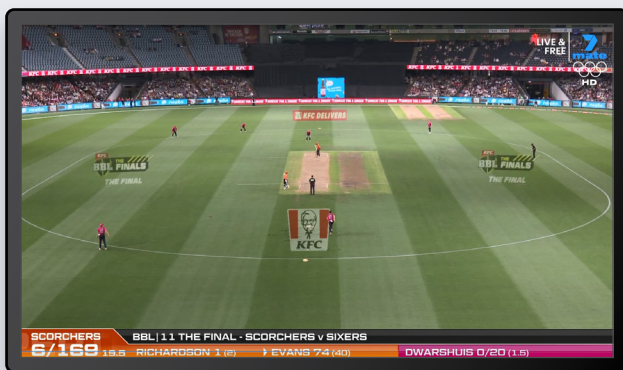
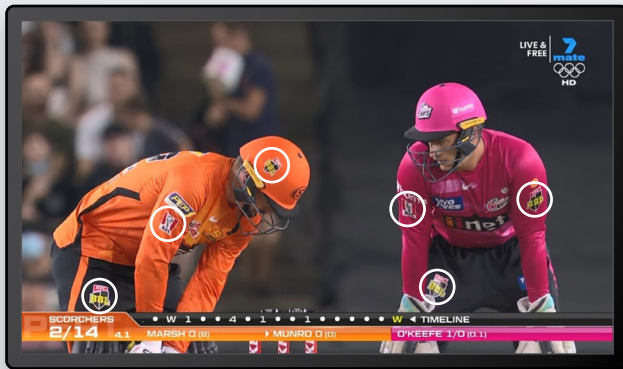


## Part 1:

### KFC brand promotion during the KFC BBL cricket final

In the 2021-22 KFC BBL cricket final:

KFC advertising was clearly visible for **40 per cent** of the in-game vision, with **over one third** of this from multiple advertising exposures on screen.



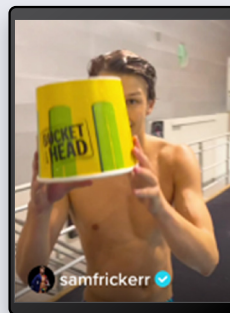
KFC advertising made up  
**five per cent**  
of the commercial break  
advertisements.

KFC marketing and branding  
was visible  
**13 times**  
more often than healthy brand  
marketing (40 per cent versus  
three per cent).

KFC encouraged cricket spectators  
**(which included children)** to wear  
KFC buckets on their head, with  
this footage featured during the  
televised coverage.

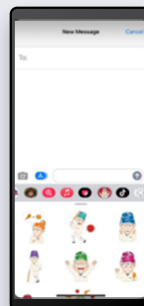


KFC capitalised on its partnership with Cricket Australia to execute cricket themed brand promotion across social media platforms during the cricket season, including **contracted Cricket Australia players participating in and promoting a TikTok KFC Bucket 'challenge' with a cash prize, eating KFC products in advertising and KFC Colonel Sanders Mobile phone message emojis.**

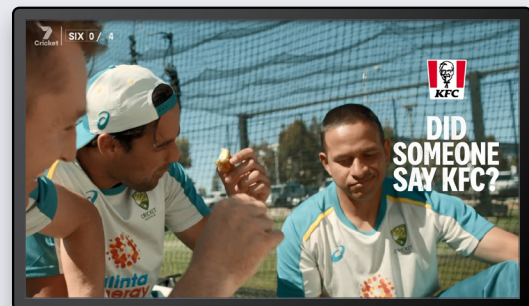


*Olympic diver Sam Fricker with 1.2 million followers advertising the KFC Bucket Flip Challenge and Australian Cricket.*

**"#ad I can't wait for this year's Cricket and KFC, show us your bucket flip using the #KFCBucketFlip #KFC #KFCAustralia #ad #KFCBUCKETHEADFLIP".**



*KFC and cricket themed emojis for download.*



*Cricket players 'eating' KFC*

Our analysis showed that KFC infiltrated every part of the BBL season, through extensive marketing during the game, extending this across social media, and aligning its brand with cricket players and other professional athletes.

## Part 2:

### Survey results

A total of 907 people responded to our survey to tell us what they thought about junk food sponsorship of sport.

373

respondents were parents with children under the age of 18 (**41 per cent**).

There were **no differences** between responses by parents compared to non-parents.

87 per cent

of parents have noticed junk food and drink brands marketing through sport.

The **top three sports** where parents recall seeing junk food marketing were:

1. Australian Rules Football  
(**72 per cent**)
2. Cricket  
(**68 per cent**)
3. Summer Olympics  
(**24 per cent**)

81 per cent

of respondents agreed that sport is no place for marketing junk food and drink to children.

89 per cent

indicated concern about the junk food and drink industry being able to use sport to market their products and brands.

**Junk food advertising in sport is undermining families' attempts to promote healthy eating to their children.**

## Three-quarters

of parents reported that junk food and drink marketing in sport made it harder for them to feed their children a healthy diet **(75 per cent)**.

Parents thought that junk food and drink marketing in sport made it more likely for their children to:

- 'pester their parents for junk food and drink products'  
**(77 per cent)**
- 'think that consuming junk food and drink is normal'  
**(74 per cent)**
- 'think it's okay to consume junk food and drink, because they are active or play sport'  
**(77 per cent)**
- 'want to eat junk food and drink products'  
**(67 per cent)**
- 'prefer the brands linked with their favourite team or players'  
**(64 per cent)**



### The comments received indicate the Western Australian community is concerned and frustrated over junk food sponsorship in sport.

Sports stars are role models to children yet **wouldn't eat the food they are promoting** (n=27).

*"It's very concerning how much children are exposed to this type of advertising and that their 'role models' aren't recognising the consequences of their involvement."*

*"These famous sports people are 'heroes' in the eyes of young children. What they do, eat, say and act is considered 'cool' and the right thing to do in their eyes. They look up to them and want to be like them. So... If they eat KFC, younger kids will want to eat KFC. It needs to stop. I'm sure professional sports players do not have junk food in their current diet."*

Junk food sponsorship in sport is **inescapable** and **makes it difficult for parents** (n=27).

*"I think it's terrible that junk food is promoted when we are trying to teach our children what food and drink is healthy. It makes it harder as a parent."*

*"You just can't avoid the junk food adverts. You want your children to play sport and enjoy watching it, but then it's in your face advertising on something that we are supporting and encouraging."*

See a **clear contradiction** in sports being associated with junk food (n=18).

*"The message is conflicting, do an activity good for health whilst being surrounded with messages that contradict this. It is extremely frustrating. As a health concerned person, it is difficult when children are surrounded by unhealthy messaging everywhere, even when accessing fitness settings."*

*"I believe that the marketing of junk food in sporting events and promotion of sports celebrities on junk food packaging is at odds with the healthy lifestyle choices that elite sports promote. It is hard to keep fit and live a healthy lifestyle when you are consuming junk food on a regular basis. It sends mixed messages to kids which can be damaging and makes it hard for them to understand why junk foods are unhealthy food choices."*

The community supports creating regulations around how the junk food industry can use sport to market their junk food products and brands.

73 per cent

of parents and

76 per cent

of non-parents agreed that junk food and drink marketing using **sports teams and players** should be **banned from social media**.

78 per cent

of parents and

85 per cent

of non-parents agreed that game time in **televised coverage of sport** should be **free from junk food and drink marketing**.

75 per cent

of parents and

79 per cent

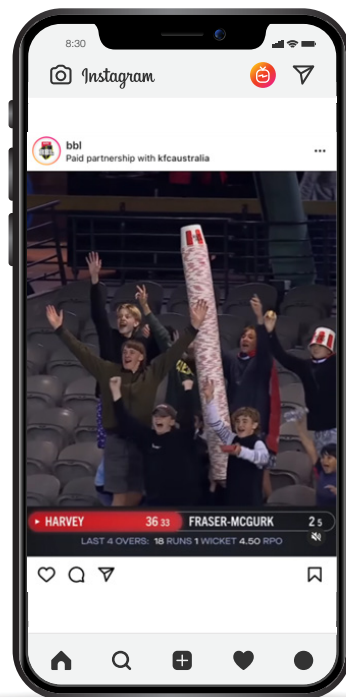
of non-parents agreed that **government owned stadiums and sporting grounds** should be **free from junk food and drink marketing**.

## Part 3:

### Ad Standards complaint

Cancer Council WA made a complaint to Ad Standards about footage seen on televised games and shared on the BBL's official social media accounts during the BBL 2021-22 cricket season. The footage shown was of children wearing empty KFC buckets on their heads, which Cancer Council WA submitted went against the code of practice by using product packaging. The industry operated code stipulates that "occasional food or beverage products must not target children and sponsorship advertising that targets children must not show occasional food or beverage products or such product packaging."

Our complaint was dismissed by the community panel of Ad Standards, finding that it did not sufficiently target children, and adults would enjoy the advertising.



*Children wearing KFC buckets on their head, used by the BBL and KFC for marketing purposes. Promoted on Instagram and televised coverage.*

# Discussion and recommendations.



## JUNK FOOD IN SPORT: IT'S JUST NOT CRICKET

Sport has the potential to play a pivotal role in improving Australian's health but to reach this potential, urgent action is required to address the role it plays in endorsing and promoting brands that are harmful to our health.

Our findings have shown that KFC branding saturated the screens and commentary of the Australian BBL season 2021-22, infiltrating every part of the game experience.

There may be limitations in our survey methodology due to the method of recruiting participants. Limited demographic data was collected to ensure a representative sample of the Western Australian population. In addition, to click through to the survey, participants had just seen a potentially leading creative which could sway a negative view of junk food in sport. Despite this, our survey findings replicate previous representative samples of the Western Australian population where 79 per cent agreed that the government has a responsibility to replace sports sponsorship by junk food/drink brands with healthier sponsors.<sup>21</sup> The responses from our survey clearly show that junk food sponsorship in sport is undermining family and community endeavours to role model healthy and sustainable eating patterns.

Setting standards on how the junk food industry is allowed to market junk food to children is a priority action for all governments as part of a comprehensive suite of strategies to improve our diets and prevent chronic disease.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations appeal to the moral responsibility of governments and civil society to act on behalf of the child to protect their right to good health, including prevention of malnutrition in all its forms and developing overweight or obesity.

Protecting children from junk food marketing exposure is a key component of this responsibility and Australia is a Member State that has endorsed the WHO 'Set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children'.<sup>9</sup>



The National Obesity Strategy recommends reducing exposure to unhealthy food and drink marketing, promotion and sponsorship especially for children as a key strategy to halt the rise in obesity.<sup>19</sup>



The Western Australian Sustainable Health Review recognises the need to "halt the rise in obesity in WA by July 2024 and have the highest percentage of the population with a healthy weight of all states in Australia by July 2029" Eliminating unhealthy food and drink promotions is highlighted as a key priority requiring State action.<sup>20</sup>

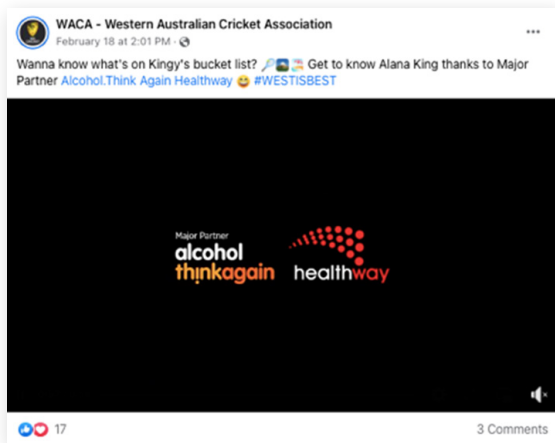


**Now is the time to listen to the community and 'even the playing field' when it comes to promoting a healthy diet to our children.**

## It can be done.

### Western Australian Cricket Association

The Western Australian Cricket Association (WACA) is one example of a success story in sport sponsorship. By receiving alternative sponsorship from Healthway, the Western Australian government health promotion agency, the WACA avoids promoting harmful industries such as junk food, sugary drinks and alcohol. As a result, the player's uniforms do not have any junk food, sugary drinks or alcohol branding, and their social media profiles display health promotion messages.



### West Coast Fever

Since 2019, West Coast Fever, Western Australia's professional netball team, has been sponsored by Healthway. Through this partnership, West Coast Fever promotes the LiveLighter® campaign messaging around physical activity, health and nutrition via signage around the court, on the scoreboard, player uniforms and on social media.



## Policy recommendations.

- The WA Government must act within its remit to protect children from junk food advertising exposure by removing junk food advertising from State-owned and managed infrastructure, including sport stadiums and public transport.
- The Australian Government must implement comprehensive regulation applying across a range of media and settings to restrict the exposure of children and young people (under 18 years) to the marketing, promotion and sponsorship of junk food, beverages and related brands.<sup>22</sup>

## What can the community do?

### As a parent or community member you can:

- Write to your Federal or State MP to ask for urgent action to restrict the exposure of children (up to 18 years) to the marketing of junk food. This action should include measures to ensure sports administrators and broadcasters are obliged to consider community health when accepting sponsorship.
- Write to your Local Government requesting the development of a policy that prohibits the advertising of junk food, including alcohol, on Local Government assets or events. This includes:
  - » No advertising of junk food, alcohol or related brands on their bus stops, public bins and community sporting grounds.
  - » No junk food, alcohol or related brands sponsoring community events and workshops.

**It's time for governments, sporting organisations and broadcasters to put people before profits and introduce higher standards for how the junk food industry markets and advertises its brands, especially to children.**

### *Acknowledgements*

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