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Vic report: Obesity crisis grossly understated

Govt urged to tackle junk food in sport, improve fast food labelling and curb marketing to children



A report released today, the Victorian Health Monitor, has found that obesity prevalence in Victoria has been grossly underestimated. The report found that, when measured, almost 25 per cent of the Victorian population has a BMI in the obese category, which is much higher than the 17 per cent rate based on self-reporting.

Jane Martin, Executive Manager of the Obesity Policy Coalition, said the new figures were a wakeup call to government and industry that a radical rethink is required of our environment if we are to stem the obesity epidemic.

"When one in four adults is obese, not just overweight, we have to ask ourselves: what can we do to turn this around? This is bigger than one individual consuming too many kilojoules. We need to address what is driving one-quarter of the population to eat too much and exercise too little," she said.

Ms Martin said the answer was to look closely at the environment that is shaping our habits, particularly around the availability of junk food, confusing food labelling, and the unrelenting promotion of unhealthy food - particularly to children.

"Currently Victorian school children are being targeted by unhealthy food brands such as McDonald's and Milo even as they play sport. While we have obesity at record rates, it's unethical that our children are being used as mobile billboards for fast food companies," she said.

Ms Martin said if we are to have any impact on reducing obesity rates in the future, we will need to break the nexus between junk food and junior sport as well as improve menu labelling.

"Victorians are consuming more processed and fast foods than ever before but they're unaware of what's really in them and how many kilojoules they contain. Consistent and widespread implementation of kilojoule labelling on fast food menus would be a great start in educating Victorians about energy intake.

"We know that kilojoule labelling influences consumers to choose lower kilojoule options," she said.

Ms Martin said the government needs to take urgent action as such high rates of overweight and obesity, particularly in the obese category, will flow through to very significant demands on hospitals and medical services for many years to come.

"Weight is now a broad community issue, it does impact on everyone, so action needs to be taken by the government as well as the individual. The government must use policy to help to turn the tide so the healthy choices are the easy choices."

Media release



About the Obesity Policy Coalition

The Obesity Policy Coalition is a group of leading public health agencies who are concerned about the escalating levels of overweight and obesity, particularly in children.

The Obesity Policy Coalition partners include Diabetes Australia - Vic, Cancer Council Victoria, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention at Deakin University.



ⁱ Victorian Population Health Survey 2009

Media release

