



## **Weighing it up Report on Obesity in Australia**

Better urban design of our cities and suburbs to encourage people to be active and a greater focus on teaching children the importance of healthy eating and exercise are key recommendations of the House of Representative's Health Committee's report *Weighing it up* released last night.

The Committee has called for national urban planning guidelines that encourage bicycle and pedestrian friendly communities and more facilities for physical activity. The Committee would also like more support for school and community programs that teach children and adults to grow, prepare and eat fresh fruit and vegetables as an alternative to high fat, high sugar and high salt foods.

These are two of 20 recommendations made by the Committee in order to help counter the growing numbers of overweight and obese people in Australia. Latest figures indicate that over half of the adults in Australia are overweight or obese.

"This has significant health and economic implications for the country," said Committee Chair Mr Steve Georganas MP (Member for Hindmarsh). "Evidence to the Committee suggests that obesity cost the Australian economy over \$8 billion in 2008. This includes the costs to the health system as a result of rising rates of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and the complications associated with surgery and other interventions."

Mr Georganas stressed that the Committee wanted to send a positive message about tackling the problem. "There are terrific programs and projects, encouraging people to eat more nutritious food and to do more exercise. Councils are putting in walking trails and facilities, school programs are making it easier for children to walk to school and community groups are setting up exercise sessions for all ages," Mr Georganas said.

Other recommendations by the Committee include:

- the food industry and government jointly develop guidelines to reformulate food (lowering sugar, salt and fats in processed food) and develop consistent nutritional advice on food labels;
- governments gather more detailed information on the weight of Australians and their levels of physical activity;
- developing better public health campaigns about obesity and the benefits of healthy lifestyles;
- continued support for the Federal Government's Active After School Communities Program;
- the Treasurer to consider tax incentives to improve the affordability of fresh healthy food and access to physical activity;
- better regulation of weight loss products and programs; and
- establishment of a registry of bariatric surgery (various surgical procedures to assist in weight loss).

**For media comment**, please contact the Committee Chair, Steve Georganas, on (02) 6277 4415 or 0437 387 378 or Heather Witham (Mr Georganas' adviser) on 0437 911 276.

**For all other information:** please contact the committee secretariat on (02) 6277 4145 or visit the Committee's inquiry website: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/haa/obesity/index.htm>