

15 May 2008

Mr James Catchpole
Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission No. 22
16105108/E

Dear Sir,

RE: Submission to the Inquiry into Obesity in Australia

The Queensland Association of School Tuckshops (QAST) is honoured to make a submission to this inquiry. QAST has been actively working with Queensland schools to improve the quality of the food supplied to students for over ten years and is encouraged to see the potential role for these food services in future health promotion activities being recognised. QAST has been instrumental in the implementation of the Queensland Government's Smart Choices "Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy in Schools" policy brought into action on January 1 2007, and fully supports building upon initiatives such as this to enhance the well being of children.

QAST believes that the quality of food and drinks supplied at school is imperative in establishing an environment for healthy food consumption patterns in children. However, we also suggest that food consumed at home or brought from home, and food consumed at sporting clubs also have significant importance towards supporting positive behaviours. We feel the outcomes of existing school canteen programs would benefit greatly by future initiatives also focusing on these settings.

Considering the broader picture some key issues are:

- Fewer families cooking a nutritious evening meal due to time constraints and lack of skills.
- The quantity of energy dense yet nutrient poor product advertising aimed at children.
- The low quality and packaged nature of food coming from home to school in lunch boxes.
- Energy dense fast foods offered for sale in sporting club canteens.

Considering school based interventions, we have learnt from our experience in delivering health promotion projects that these institutions are consistently under pressure and are at full capacity delivering curriculum based outcomes. The success of such programs is therefore usually highly dependant on there being individuals within the broader school community, for example within the parent body, willing to implement the change. In these circumstances whilst positive short term impacts may be achieved, without a sustained focus and integration within the institution's core business school based initiatives may have limited long term outcomes.

QAST suggests that schools be given health outcomes to be measured against, however with suitable funding to increase their capacity. One suggestion is to create positions in the school, or a collective of schools, for health promotion officers using a similar model to the School Based Youth Health Nurses in Queensland high schools delivering screening and counselling services. Please note however these positions are already under resourced and not trained for this health promotion role.

In the canteen setting, our suggestions for improvement are mostly targeted at strengthening the sector to enable a substantial further improvement in the delivery of freshly prepared foods where practical through school food services. To enable this we are suggesting the following:

- Research into the changing nature of food and drinks purchased through school food services. QAST is currently working on a Queensland survey of members to ascertain the characteristics of viable yet healthy canteens. This survey has been funded by MBF Foundation in Queensland. This could be rolled out nationally.
- Investigation into the school food provision systems in other countries to inform innovative new models that best meet the needs of children in our schools.
- Recognition and valuing the convenor position in canteens to deliver health programs by:
 - Developing a national training program
 - Developing a realistic national award for remuneration that encourages convenors to stay in the position
 - Investigating the concept that convenors be employed by the school and not the volunteer parent body to overcome consistently poor employment management.
- The State Government policies have used a food supply orientated strategy that classifies foods and drinks into a traffic light grouping of red, amber and green. These programs require further support, addressing aspects such as funding for equipment, training in preparing fresh foods, and communication resources. The integrity of these strategies and others with nutrient content based criteria is also reliant on accurate nutrition information panels and food labels on products for which an improved national surveillance system is required.
- Broadening State Government policies to include sporting club canteens and other child and young person settings such as youth clubs and scouting groups.

There currently is work commencing on a National Canteen Framework by Flinder's University. This work has been commissioned by The Department of Health and Ageing. Any new framework needs to consider the interaction with the State Government strategies and how this will impact on the canteens in state and independent schools.

QAST thank you again for the opportunity to submit to your inquiry and would be keen to assist in any way possible in the future.

Yours sincerely,



LORIE ROBINSON
President