



Department of Health
Government of Western Australia

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WA Country Health Service
South West - Public Health

12th May 2008

House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Inquiry into Obesity in Australia

As articulated in the Eat Well Be Active WA Strategic Framework for Public Health Nutrition and Physical Activity, 2004 - 2010, a person's health is determined by many factors.

Similarly the complexity of maintaining a healthy weight, must be taken into account in any strategies that are considered in the quest to prevent and reduce overweight and obesity in the Australian population. Further, there are unique issues for consideration in rural communities.

To follow is a brief summary of some of the key factors relevant to the general Australian community as well as to the communities in the South West of WA. These have been presented utilising the Ottawa Charter Framework.

Build Healthy Public Policy

- Minimum standards with regard to healthy eating and physical activity in key settings, schools and child care centres for example.
- Family friendly policy to encourage and support breastfeeding.
- Workplace policy that provide opportunities and incentives for employees to eat well and be active.

Create Supportive Environments

- Address factors that impact on an individual's ability to eat well and be sufficiently active, including socioeconomic, living and working conditions.
- Leadership and resources dedicated to the promotion of breastfeeding, both in the hospital and community settings.
- Support for local primary producers to play a key role in meeting local demand for fresh produce. For example leadership in the areas of Farmer's Markets and Community Supported Agriculture initiatives.

Strengthen Community Action

- Support for initiatives that assist local communities to address barriers to healthy eating and being sufficiently physically active. For example, ensuring community access to good quality, affordable vegetables and fruit.
- Development of local community networks that can engage key stakeholders to work collectively to support healthy eating and physical activity initiatives.

Develop Personal Skills

- Targeted, culturally appropriate programs to increase consumer confidence and skills in shopping and cooking healthy, value for money meals.

- Assistance for local “community champions” to provide peer support regarding healthy eating and physical activity.

Reorient Services and Programs

- While demand continues to be strong for acute services, this reduces the opportunity to include prevention and promotion initiatives in the daily work routine of many health care practitioners. Consideration of how to best address this issue is required.

In addition to the above mentioned factors, country WA has the added challenges of large geographical areas resulting in many clients having to travel further for both specialist and essential health services (especially those that reside on outlying agricultural properties). Clients may also have limited support from family and friends if they have recently moved to a rural area for work or lifestyle reasons. Further, the demands of agricultural pursuits can also reduce client availability to access services for a myriad of reasons including lack of financial security, for example the impact of drought and industry deregulation on some primary producers and the inability to leave crops and livestock untended, particularly at peak times.

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