



JE 14/05/08

Mr James Catchpole  
Committee Secretary  
Inquiry into Obesity in Australia  
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra  
ACT 2600

7 May 2008

Dear Mr Catchpole,

**Submission from The Parents Jury to the Inquiry into Obesity in Australia**

The Parents Jury is a national online forum of over 3,100 parents who are interested in improving the nutrition and physical activity environments of Australian children. We are supported financially and with management expertise by Diabetes Australia – Vic, WA and Qld, The Cancer Council Australia and its member bodies, Vic Health, and the Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society. These organisations jointly have a strong interest in working together towards healthier food and activity environments for children and turning around the rapidly increasing overweight and obesity levels amongst Australian children.

The Parents Jury is a dynamic platform through which parents can express their opinions, communicate with each other, share experiences, gather information and advocacy resources, and work together to campaign towards a healthy lifestyle for all Australian children.

This submission is made on behalf of the members of The Parents Jury to express our concern regarding the rising obesity levels amongst Australian children, and to propose a number of key recommendations that we believe will be important positive steps towards creating a healthier future for our children.

The Parents Jury recognises that weight gain and the avoidance of weight gain are influenced by both individual behaviours and environmental factors. We believe government can play an important role in supporting parents to make healthy choices and address Australia's increasing "obesity-promoting" environment.

The Parents Jury frequently conducts member polls to establish parents' views on important topics relating to children's food and activity issues. The results of these polls

The Parents Jury is supported by:



The Parents Jury  
570 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne 3000, ph: 03 9667 1742, fax: 03 9667 1778, email: [enquiries@parentsjury.org.au](mailto:enquiries@parentsjury.org.au)  
[www.parentsjury.org.au](http://www.parentsjury.org.au)



are referred to throughout this submission to outline our members' concerns and the strength of feeling from parents about these topics.

### **Issue one: Unhealthy food and beverage advertising to children on television**

Members of The Parents Jury have repeatedly voted unhealthy food and beverage advertising to children as their number one concern and we consider it a priority area for action. This is a key area where the federal government can take decisive action.

Australian studies over the last 10 years have consistently shown that between 55% and 81% of food advertisements shown during children's viewing times are for unhealthy foods of low nutritional value such as confectionery, sweetened breakfast cereals and fast food. Advertisements directed at children often use sophisticated marketing techniques such as give-aways, competitions, celebrity endorsements, animations and jingles to increase a child's desire to purchase products. These types of advertisements may give a distorted message and may not provide a clear nutritional representation of the ingredients of the particular product. In short, the high volumes of unhealthy food advertising combined with a variety of persuasive marketing techniques results in the "normalisation" of regular consumption of unhealthy food and beverage choices.

Members of The Parents Jury are very concerned about the high volume of advertisements for unhealthy foods and beverages that children are exposed to and also about the variety of marketing gimmicks, such as the use of inducements that encourage pester power. In May 2007 in a poll of Parents Jury members, 97% responded "yes" when asked if they would you like to see a ban on the advertising of unhealthy food and beverages during television programs where children make up a high percentage of the viewing audience. We are aware that these poll results are consistent with a nationally representative sample of parents as part of a research study carried out in early 2007.

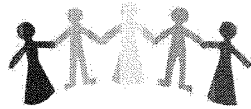
#### Recommendation:

The Parents Jury recommends a ban on the advertising of all unhealthy foods during the times that children are likely to be watching free to air commercial television, from 6am to 9pm. The classification of unhealthy foods and beverages should include those that are high in fat, sugar and salt and be determined by a nutrient profiling model such as that adapted by Food Standards Australia and New Zealand. Children are defined as those under the age of 16.

The Parents Jury is supported by:



The Parents Jury  
570 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne 3000, ph: 03 9667 1742, fax: 03 9667 1778, email: [enquiries@parentsjury.org.au](mailto:enquiries@parentsjury.org.au)  
[www.parentsjury.org.au](http://www.parentsjury.org.au)



the parents jury

*Your voice on food and activity*

www.parentsjury.org.au

## Issue two: Other types of unhealthy food marketing to children

In addition to a ban on unhealthy food and beverage advertising to children on commercial free-to-air television, we believe that comprehensive restrictions are required to control all other types of unhealthy food and beverage marketing to children. Members of The Parents Jury are very concerned about the increasing prevalence of a diverse range of marketing techniques that target children in all aspects of their daily life. These include but are not limited to:

- ξ Subscription television channels directed to children
- ξ **Internet promotions directed to children**
- ξ Product placement in television programs, films etc
- ξ Cinema advertisements during films of appeal to children
- ξ Magazine and print promotions including advertisements / advertorials / competitions / inserts / giveaways
- ξ In-store (eg in supermarkets, video or fast food stores) promotions and giveaways
- ξ Placement of unhealthy food and beverages at supermarket checkout counters and their immediate vicinity
- ξ On-pack promotions including the endorsement of celebrities / cartoon characters
- ξ Computer games with food promotions embedded into them
- ξ School and educational resource marketing including sponsorship and giveaways
- ξ Viral marketing
- ξ Text message marketing

Food and beverage manufacturers spend millions of dollars each year trying to persuade children to consume their unhealthy products. The marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages heavily outweighs the promotion of those that are healthy, and urgent action is needed in order to redress the balance and assist children and their parents in making healthy choices on a daily basis.

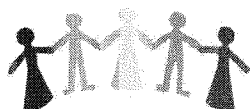
### Recommendation:

The Parents Jury recommends a comprehensive ban on all types of unhealthy food and beverage marketing to children across all media including the Internet, radio, magazines, educational resources, in-store, email and SMS. We urge the Australian Government to develop legislation that is consistent with the International Code for Marketing to Children, developed by Consumers International and the International Obesity Taskforce.

The Parents Jury is supported by:



The Parents Jury  
570 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne 3000, ph: 03 9667 1742, fax: 03 9667 1778, email: [enquiries@parentsjury.org.au](mailto:enquiries@parentsjury.org.au)  
[www.parentsjury.org.au](http://www.parentsjury.org.au)



the parents jury

*Your voice on food and activity*

[www.parentsjury.org.au](http://www.parentsjury.org.au)

### **Issue Three: Sports club sponsorship by unhealthy food companies**

Members of The Parents Jury are very concerned about the prevalence of sponsorship of children's sporting clubs by unhealthy food and beverage companies. Many large and small children's sports clubs across Australia receive financial support from food and beverage companies in return for promoting their products to children. Advertising at sports venues, logos on club uniforms and vouchers for free food and drinks are just some of the ways that companies use sporting associations as part of their overall marketing strategy.

In a poll undertaken by The Parents Jury in June 2006, 93.5% of parents responded "yes" when asked if government regulations are needed to limit children's sports sponsorships by food and beverage companies promoting unhealthy foods. Just over half of all respondents said that it would be a good idea for governments to "buy out" unhealthy children's sports sponsorships in the same way that VicHealth did with tobacco sponsorship of Victorian clubs in the 1980's.

Children participate in sport for fitness and social activity and it is important that clubs promote a healthy lifestyle and a positive attitude to children. Unhealthy marketing, which is contrary to health goals for children, should not be permissible in children's sport.

#### Recommendation:

The Parents Jury recommends legislation is introduced to ban all unhealthy food and beverage sponsorship of children's sporting activities. Again, we urge the Australian Government to develop legislation that is consistent with the International Code for Marketing to Children, developed by Consumers International and the International Obesity Taskforce

### **Issue Four: Comprehensive healthy food guidelines in all Australian state and territory schools**

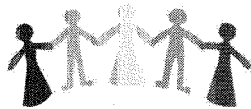
Members of The Parents Jury feel strongly that comprehensive mandatory nutrition guidelines are needed in schools in all Australian states and territories to ensure that only healthy foods and drinks are available to children in all school settings.

When polled in April 2006, 73% of Parents Jury members who responded (whose children attended a school with a canteen) said that they would allow their children to buy food from the school canteen more frequently if it only sold healthy options. In another poll in April 2008, 39% of parents reported that their children are sometimes given sweets as a reward by their teacher. An overwhelming 90% said that they disapprove of this practice.

The Parents Jury is supported by:



The Parents Jury  
570 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne 3000, ph: 03 9667 1742, fax: 03 9667 1778, email: [enquiries@parentsjury.org.au](mailto:enquiries@parentsjury.org.au)  
[www.parentsjury.org.au](http://www.parentsjury.org.au)



the parents jury

*Your voice on food and activity*

[www.parentsjury.org.au](http://www.parentsjury.org.au)

Schools have a responsibility to teach children about good nutrition and healthy eating, and they should demonstrate these practices by setting a good example through all aspects of school life.

Recommendation:

The Parents Jury recommends that all Australian states and territories implement mandatory guidelines that only allow healthy foods and beverages to be available in all school settings including in school canteens, in vending machines, for fundraising activities, as classroom rewards, at sporting activities and on incursions/excursions.

Thank you for considering The Parents Jury's submission. The Parents Jury believes the Government can play a vital role in ensuring that healthy choices are made the easy choices, and help to foster an environment that is much less obesity promoting. We look forward to seeing positive changes as a result of the Inquiry into Obesity that will create a healthier future for Australian children and a more supportive environment for parents.

Yours sincerely,

Justine Hodge  
The Parents Jury Manager

The Parents Jury is supported by:



The Parents Jury  
570 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne 3000, ph: 03 9667 1742, fax: 03 9667 1778, email: [enquiries@parentsjury.org.au](mailto:enquiries@parentsjury.org.au)  
[www.parentsjury.org.au](http://www.parentsjury.org.au)