

Obesity prevention policy: Can we nudge from the bottom up and the top down?

Children's environments in Australia

Nudging for Better Health Conference

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The need to nudge: Childhood obesity in Australia

- 25% of Australian Children are overweight or obese
- ↑ risk of overweight and obesity in adulthood
- ↑ risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers
- Children's diets are poor –sugary drinks, fast food and processed foods, with few eating enough fruit and vegetables

The need to nudge: Childhood obesity in Australia

Evidence establishes children are influenced by environmental nudges:

School – canteens, vending machines, fundraising, prizes;

Sport – broadcast, professional, community, local, sponsorship

Online – advergames, apps, social media, branded websites,

TV, movies – product placement, ads, themes, characters

Neighbourhood and home – food outlets, retail environments

Summary: Saturated nudging in children's food environments.

1. TV – free to air, pay TV, product placement, commercials, sports broadcasts, branded content
2. Websites, games, apps, “sharing” on Facebook, competitions, peer endorsement, increasing uptake of devices and tablets
3. Sport and activities – club sponsorship, prizes, programs, uniforms, merchandise
4. Schools and settings – vending machines, canteens, sport, fundraising
5. Giveaways, toys, movie tie-ins, collectables, colouring competitions.
6. Packaging – celebrity endorsement, sports stars, health and claims, characters, DIG

Nudging from the top down and the bottom up: key priorities

Bottom up nudges - individuals

1. Programs, campaigns, education, information, schools

Top Down nudges - environments

1. School environments

2. Reduce exposure to advertising

3. Keep kids settings commercial-interest free (sport)

4. Enable informed choices

School environments



- States' approaches to school food environments vary
- Largely guideline-based (non-mandatory)
- Poor enforcement and monitoring
- Not sufficiently comprehensive
- Not consistent with Australian and international dietary guidelines
- Used by food and beverage industry for advocacy
- Consistent national approach needed

Reduce children's exposure to advertising

- Time based controls – high rating programs
- Application across all forms of media
- Particular consideration of new and emerging media for children – social media, apps, advergames etc.
- Clear definition of unhealthy foods
- Application across the industry
- Transparency, accessibility and fairness.

Sponsorship of kids sport

- Growth area for advertisers
- Builds strong positive brand associations with very young consumers
- Healthy “halo” – weight washing
- Research shows a majority of children think food and beverage sponsors participate to help out the clubs (85%), and they like to return the favour by buying products (59%)
- Strong public support for phasing out this nudging

Enable informed choices

- Implement interpretive front of pack labelling – Health Star Rating System
- Address misleading use of the Daily Intake Guide labels
- Allow clear, accessible and consistent nutrition information
- Independent system



