

3 August 2010



Dear MP,

We are writing to emphasize to you the importance of the next Australian government adopting a comprehensive strategy to address Australia's current obesity epidemic.

The obesity epidemic is one of the most important public health challenges facing Australia today.

Obesity afflicts 3.8 million Australians and costs \$58bn per year and the number of obese Australians is set to nearly double to 6.9 million by 2025. Based on these figures, around 25,000 people in your electorate are currently obese and an additional 20,000 are likely to join them in the next 15 years.

Obesity is a major cause of chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, kidney disease and cancer, diseases which already account for nearly half of the disease burden in Australia. Without effective action now, future health costs will surge as a result of obesity driven increases in chronic disease, while Australians' wellbeing and productivity will drop.

Given the scale and impact of the problem, we cannot afford to delay immediate and comprehensive action to reduce the health, economic and social costs of increasing rates of obesity.

Important initiatives to address obesity are already underway including federal funding for community, school and work based programs, and we applaud these. But the scale and complexity of the obesity problem means much more needs to be done to achieve a significant change in obesity trends. In particular much more needs to be done to reshape the environments in which we live to make it easier for people to make *and to sustain* lifestyle changes that benefit their health.

This will help to maximise the benefits of current investments in obesity control.

Consequently, the Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (ACDPA) calls on the next Australian government to build on existing obesity initiatives by fully implementing the comprehensive obesity strategy recommended by the National Preventative Health Taskforce with emphasis on:

- Reducing exposure of children to advertising and marketing of unhealthy foods;
- Implementing new and easier to understand front-of-pack nutrition labelling on processed foods that provides at a glance interpretation to help consumers make healthier food choices
- Increased support for the food reformulation strategy to accelerate reductions in levels of saturated fats, salt and sugar in processed food;
- Developing a national approach to encourage increased physical activity including an active transport strategy and re-orienting urban planning to support increased physical activity.

Further information on these priorities is enclosed.

We urge you to consider the impact of current obesity trends on the future health and wellbeing of Australians and hope you will support our recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

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Diabetes Australia

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