

MEDIA RELEASE

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Alarming data prompts international expert's calls for stronger policy to protect Australian kids from junk food advertising

Cancer Council research reveals the staggering \$129.5M advertising spend by the sugary drink industries vastly outweighs investment in public health advertising in Australia, enticing young Australians to consume these unhealthy products.

Total advertising expenditure on sugary drinks alone reached more than \$129.5M over two years, around five times the level of government investment (\$26.5M) in public health campaigns promoting healthy eating, physical activity and obesity prevention combined.

The [study](#) found that at least 80 per cent of the advertising spend promoting sugary drinks could be visible to kids going about their daily lives, with nearly half (45%) of advertising budget spent on TV advertising and more than a third (35%) on out of home advertising.

Regular sugary drinks consumption can cause unhealthy weight gain, which in turn increases the risk of serious, chronic diseases, including 13 types of cancer.

Clare Hughes, Chair of Cancer Council's Nutrition, Alcohol and Physical Activity Committee warns that without stronger protections from all levels of government, children will continue to be bombarded with unhealthy food and drink advertising that contributes to obesity and undermines the effectiveness of positive public health messaging.

"Sugary drink companies are putting millions behind advertising, where they know kids will see it. Every junk food ad shapes our kids' diets including what our kids want to and will eat as, well as what they think a healthy diet looks like," Ms Hughes cautions.

"Our children should be free to walk to school, without seeing the latest soft drink ad at their bus stop. They should be able to enjoy watching their footy team score or their favourite TV program without being bombarded with harmful marketing that increases the risk of obesity, and 13 types of cancer later in life," Ms Hughes said.

The Australian Government's [National Preventive Health Strategy](#) and [National Obesity Strategy](#) recommend using mass media campaigns to promote healthy eating and physical activity. For such public health campaigns to effectively promote healthy behaviours, they must not compete with the millions that the processed food industry is spending.

Meanwhile the [2022 Food Policy Index scorecard](#) reports that Australia is going backwards when compared to other countries on unhealthy food marketing, despite the release of the two government Strategies recommending action to reduce the public's (especially children's) exposure to unhealthy food and drink marketing and promotion.

Whilst other countries have continued to improve their advertising restrictions, the Food Policy Index scorecard notes Australia has had "low" progress on restricting the promotion of unhealthy foods in broadcast media, and "very little, if any" progress on online promotion.

The same scorecard cites as best practice the legislation on junk food marketing passed by the United Kingdom, where – once it comes into force – advertising for foods high in fat, salt and/or sugar will not be permitted on television before 9pm and there will be a complete ban on paid advertising for foods high in fat, salt and/or sugar online.

Malcolm Clark, Senior Prevention Policy Manager at Cancer Research UK, led campaigns to reduce childhood obesity, and is currently in Australia encouraging all levels of government to follow the UK's lead on restricting junk food marketing.

“Acting early is crucial. These advertising policies could have a lasting impact on cancers related to excess weight for generations to come. The TV and online advertising restrictions alone could reduce the number of children in the United Kingdom with obesity by more than 20,000 and save significant health costs,” Mr Clark said.

“Importantly, the policies also prompt industry to focus on making and promoting healthier products in the place of unhealthy foods.”

“Measures introduced in the United Kingdom to restrict junk food advertising, reduce the in-store promotion of less healthy food and drink, and tax sugary drinks are popular and effective steps towards creating a healthier environment for every child. Politicians in Australia should not be afraid to follow suit,” Mr Clark encouraged.

Cancer Council is calling on all Australian governments to follow suit, by developing a comprehensive food marketing policy framework that includes:

- Ensuring TV, radio and cinemas are free from unhealthy food marketing from 6am-9.30pm
- Preventing processed food companies from targeting children
- Ensuring public spaces and events are free from unhealthy food marketing
- Protecting children from digital marketing of unhealthy food

“When governments take action to restrict unhealthy food advertising, they make their health promotion efforts like public health campaigns, much more effective. More importantly, they make it easier for Australian families to raise happy, healthy children who enjoy long and healthy lives,” Ms Hughes concluded.

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Contact details

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About Cancer Council Australia

Cancer Council Australia is Australia's leading cancer charity, working to reduce the impact of cancer for all Australians. Cancer Council Australia works with its members, the eight state and territory Cancer Councils to:

- Undertake and fund cancer research
- Prevent and control cancer



- Provide information and support for people affected by cancer
- Shape and influence policy and practice

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