**Policy Position Statement on Food Advertising and Marketing Practices to Children, April 2008**

**Position**

The AHA sees no ethical, political, scientific, or social justification for marketing and advertising low-nutrient, high-calorie foods to children and supports efforts to diminish this practice in the United States. Typically, researchers define children as infants (birth to less than 2), preschool (ages 2-5), school age (ages 6-11), and adolescents (ages 12-17). This policy statement particularly relates to children 12 and under who are developmentally less able to comprehend the intent of marketing and advertising strategies, but does not preclude the need to curb strategies targeted at adolescents as well.

The AHA believes Congress should restore to the Federal trade Commission (FTC) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) the ability to regulate marketing of foods and beverages to children. The AHA would support other measures that restrict food advertising and marketing to children including, but not limited to allowing only healthy foods to be marketed and advertised to children, discouraging the product placement of food brands in multiple media technologies, eliminating the use of toys in unhealthy kids’ restaurant meals, using licensed characters on only healthy foods, and not allowing food and beverage advertising and marketing in schools or on educational materials.

**Rationale**

Although many European countries rigidly control or ban food advertising to children, it is not well regulated in the United States. The food industry spends $15 billion per year on marketing and advertising to children, twice the amount spent a decade before. Brand licensing is becoming more and more pervasive, where a programme or its licensed characters are used to promote purchase of a particular food.

Advertisers emphasise emotion rather than reason – a developmentally appropriate strategy – in appealing to children: fun/happiness and play; fantasy/imagination; social enhancement/peer acceptance; and ‘coolness’.

The influence of food advertising has a particularly adverse impact on at-risk children. Research indicates that children from lower socioeconomic classes where obesity rates are higher, report more television viewing than children in higher socioeconomic classes, increasing their exposure to advertising, as well as reducing their physical activity. The food industry is looking to establish brand identity at an early age, which promotes life-long adherence to potentially unhealthy patterns of consumption.
If the United States is to effectively address the obesity epidemic, regulating food marketing and advertising to children should be one of the key prevention strategies.

**Summary Policy Recommendations**

**Specific Recommendations:**

1. Congress should restore the FTC and FCC to their full capacity to regulate marketing to children. At minimum, as the third-party oversight system continues over the short term, the goal should be to strengthen enforcement as much as possible to minimize non-compliance and establish uniform nutrition standards for foods that can be marketed and advertised to children.

2. Only healthy foods should be advertised and marketed to children (these foods would include fruit, 100% fruit juice, vegetables, low fat dairy products, and whole grain foods). Implicit in this is that foods that are advertised meet criteria that AHA has set for nutrients that affect CVD risk (i.e., saturated fat, trans-fat, cholesterol, fibre). Additionally, advertising of healthy foods to children should include positive messages about physical activity.

3. Product placement of food brands should be discouraged in the multiple media technologies including movies, videogames, advergaming, social networking sites, cell phones, Podcasts, and television programming geared to children.

4. Toy companies and the movie industry should not be able to partner with fast-food companies to market unhealthy meals to children.

5. Licensed characters should only be used to market healthy foods to children.

6. Advertising, marketing and brand awareness strategies used by industry should not be allowed in schools or on educational materials.