Position statement – Food marketing to children

Policy context for food marketing to children

Currently in Australia, there is a mix of limited government regulation, voluntary advertising codes and voluntary food industry initiatives covering food marketing to children. This mixed regulatory system does not provide a coordinated system, but rather a complex and confusing arrangement, with inadequate restriction of children’s exposure to unhealthy food advertising, and non-existent or inadequate enforcement, monitoring and complaint handling.

Recommendations

Cancer Council believes reform of food marketing regulations is a priority public health goal. Children should be protected from the potential harms of food marketing and parents should be able to raise their children in an environment that is conducive to the development of healthy eating practices.

To better protect children from unhealthy food, Cancer Council recommends that Government develop a specific food marketing policy framework and embed this in statutory regulation. This government regulation should:

- Prioritise the protection of children from the influence of unhealthy food marketing.
- Significantly reduce children’s exposure to food advertising that promotes unhealthy foods.
- Apply to any unhealthy food advertisement that is intended or likely to appeal to children (whether or not the advertisement is also intended or likely to appeal to older age groups) and apply to all advertisements screened on television between 7-9am and 4-9pm on weekdays and 7am-9pm on weekends, independent of whether they are shown in a designated children’s programme or not.
- Apply to all media and forms of marketing, including TV, radio and print advertising, online marketing, food company websites, social media, sports sponsorship, on-pack and in-store promotions and outdoor advertising, which is directed to children aged un 16 years, or to which a high number of children under 16 years are likely to be exposed.
- Include limiting persuasive techniques that are used to promote unhealthy food to children such as the use of promotional characters and premium offers.
- Use independently-developed and consistent nutrition criteria to ensure only healthy foods are promoted to children, such as the nutrient profiling scoring criteria in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code, Standards 1.2.7 – Nutrition, Health and Related Claims.
- Include independent, clear and transparent monitoring and enforcement processes.
- Ensure open and transparent regulatory and government processes which are easy for the public to engage with.
- Subject regulations to regular reviews to ensure they cover emerging technologies and techniques used to reach children.
- Include significant and meaningful penalties that deter companies from breaching regulations.

Cancer Council supports government regulation of food advertising to children, as industry self-regulation of food marketing has not adequately addressed children’s high level of exposure to unhealthy food advertising or the persuasive marketing techniques commonly used by food companies to target children.