



Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments

**2019 progress update
Australian Federal
Government**

March 2019

Further details available at
www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

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Executive summary

Unhealthy diets and obesity are leading contributors to poor health in Australia. Addressing obesity and improving population diets requires a comprehensive government response at Commonwealth and State/Territory levels.

In 2017, a Food Policy Index was developed for Australia to assess the food and diet-related policies that were in place in each jurisdiction, and identify recommended actions for each government based on international best practice.

This report provides a follow up to the 2017 Food Policy Index report. It summarises and assesses the actions taken by the Australian Federal Government (July 2016 – December 2018) in relation to the recommended policies identified in the 2017 report.

Key areas in which the Australian Federal Government has made progress



Leadership

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Health Council agreed that a national strategy be developed on obesity, with a strong focus on the primary and secondary prevention and social determinants of health



Food labelling

Continued commitment to and investment in the Health Star Rating (HSR) system and the 5-year review of the HSR system. Substantial progress in considering options for the labelling of added sugars on packaged food and drinks



Food composition

Progressing the activities of the Healthy Food Partnership, including through development of draft reformulation targets for manufactured foods, and development of a voluntary food services pledge scheme



Recommended action areas for the Australian Federal Government

The 2017 Food Policy Index report prioritised 34 recommendations for action. Recommended focus areas for the next 12-18 months are:



Leadership: Develop a comprehensive National Obesity Strategy, based on best practice recommendations for obesity prevention and incorporating consensus recommendations from public health groups



Food labelling: Finalise the outcomes of the 5-year review of the HSR system, including adoption of the recommendations coming out of the review. Finalise work on the labelling of added sugars on packaged food and drinks



Food composition: Set comprehensive national targets for reformulation of packaged food, including detailed monitoring and reporting of progress, and strong incentives for industry to meet targets

Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI)

In 2017, a Food Policy Index was developed for Australia to assess the extent to which governments in Australia were implementing globally recommended policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments.¹

The project was conducted as part of INFORMAS,² an international network of food policy and public health experts. The project implemented the Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI) tool, developed by INFORMAS to assess government policy across 14 domains related to food environments and applied in >10 countries. As part of the Food-EPI Australia 2017 project, recommended actions for each government (Federal, State and Territory) were developed and prioritised, based on international best practice and consultation with >100 non-government public health experts representing 53 organisations.

Assessment of progress made

The Food-EPI Australia 2017 report identified and prioritised 16 recommended policy actions and 18 recommended infrastructure support actions for the Australian Federal Government, as part of efforts to create healthier food environments and address obesity.

The purpose of this 2019 Progress Update was to assess progress made by the Australian Federal Government in relation to the recommended policy actions.

Government officials from each jurisdiction in Australia provided information on actions taken by their government in relation to the recommended actions from the Food-EPI Australia 2017 report. This included all activities from **July 2016** (the date up to which policies were assessed in the 2017 report) to **December 2018**.

The actions were summarised, and progress in relation to each recommendation was assessed by the project team as 'Substantive action', 'Some action' or 'Limited action', based on the criteria in Table 1. The full details of actions taken and progress made by other jurisdictions are available at: www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

Substantive action

- Implemented substantive action in relation to all or most components of the recommendation

Some action

- Implemented action in relation to some components of the recommendation; and/or
- Taken steps to initiate or formulate plans in relation to the recommendation, but relevant actions have not yet been implemented

Limited action

- Taken no substantive action in relation to the recommendation; and/or
- Made no or very limited progress in the area

Table 1: Criteria for assessment of progress made

¹ Sacks G for the Food-EPI Australia project team. Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments: scorecard and priority recommendations for Australian governments. Melbourne: Deakin University, 2017. Available at: www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

² www.informas.org

Actions taken (July 2016 - December 2018) by the Australian Federal Government in relation to the recommended policies from the 2017 Food Policy Index report

A] Policy actions

	Domain	Recommended policy action	Progress in relation to recommended action	Assessment
POL1	Food prices	Implement a health levy on sugar-sweetened drinks to increase consumer-end prices by 20%, and invest revenue raised into public health interventions	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
POL2	Food promotion	Implement mandatory time-based (up to 9:00pm) restrictions of unhealthy food and beverage advertising on broadcast media, including effective monitoring and enforcement	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
POL3	Food composition	Establish clear national targets for reductions in salt, saturated fat, trans fat and added sugar in key food categories related to packaged foods and out-of-home meals	The Healthy Food Partnership Food Reformulation Working Group has drafted and initiated consultation on draft voluntary reformulation targets across food categories identified as significant contributors to the intake of sodium, saturated fat and sugars in the Australian diet. Draft targets have been proposed for 36 food categories.	Some action
POL4	Food labelling	Fast-track changes to the Health Star Rating scheme to address anomalies / design issues, and make the scheme mandatory for all packaged food by July 2019	The government has made significant progress in addressing issues with the Health Star Rating system, and has conducted in depth consultation with stakeholders. Of particular note is changes to the 'as prepared' rule (June 2018), which will now see foods only able to display Health Star Rating on packages 'as sold' (with some exemptions). The 5 year review of the Health Star Rating is underway (due mid-late 2019), which will identify other aspects of the system that may need to be addressed.	Some action
POL5	Food promotion	Staged removal of unhealthy food and beverage sponsorship of major sporting codes and events	As part of the COAG Health Council's (CHC) work on limiting the impact of unhealthy food and drinks on children, the CHC is considering ways to reduce the availability and promotion of unhealthy food and drinks at sport and recreation venues. A joint statement between Sport and Recreation Ministers and the CHC identifies opportunities for governments and organisations across Australia to improve food and drink associated with children's sport and recreation.	Some action
POL6	Food prices	Implement a health levy on unhealthy foods to increase consumer-end prices by 20%, and invest revenue raised into public health interventions	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
POL7	Food promotion	Remove the tax deductibility (for companies) of marketing expenditure related to the promotion of unhealthy food and beverages	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
POL8	Food labelling	Restrict the use of nutrition content claims on discretionary foods (as defined by the Australian Dietary Guidelines and associated resources)	The Australian Government Department of Health has commissioned the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to review the evidence and reports about consumer, clinician educator and industry understanding of the current 'discretionary' food category associated with the Australian Dietary Guidelines. NHMRC will report on possible definitions of discretionary food and drinks suggested by the review, which may be used in a range of policy contexts.	Some action

POL9	Food labelling	Provide resources to support improved consumer awareness / understanding of the Health Star Rating scheme, particularly in vulnerable populations	The Health Star Rating website provides resources to support uptake and understanding of the Health Star Rating scheme, including factsheets, posters, infographics, social media and information videos/articles. Between February – April 2017 a fourth stage of the consumer campaign was conducted to increase awareness / understanding of the system. The Department of Health is currently considering options for the next stage of the Health Star Rating campaign.	Substantive action
POL10	Food labelling	Develop national guidelines for nutrition labelling on the menus of food service outlets, including the potential adaptation of the Health Star Rating scheme for these purposes, to ensure a consistent approach is used across Australia	In April 2017, the ANZ Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation identified one of its priority areas for 2017-21 as supporting public health objectives to reduce chronic disease related to obesity; including evaluating the effectiveness of existing initiatives, such as menu labelling schemes. There has been a review of the fast food menu labelling schemes (early 2018), and further targeted consultation will occur to develop policy options that aim to improve fast food menu labelling in Australia.	Some action
POL11	Food provision	Implement clear, consistent policies to provide and promote healthy food choices in food service activities in settings under Federal government control. This includes public sector workplaces, and government-owned, funded or managed services	The CHC agreed actions to limit the impact of unhealthy food and drink on children, including: improving food and drinks associated with children's sport and recreation; initiatives that strengthen school-based efforts to encourage and support healthy eating; national minimum acceptable nutrition standards for food and drink in public health care facilities; a national interim voluntary guide to define unhealthy food and drinks for use by jurisdictions to reduce the exposure of children to unhealthy marketing in settings under government control.	Some action
POL12	Food provision	Update and strengthen the National Healthy School Canteen guidelines (including restrictions on the promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages in all schools), and provide additional resources to support the States / Territories to implement the guidelines	The CHC has endorsed a joint statement with the COAG Education Council on healthy eating in school, and is collaborating with them to strengthen and increase the impact of school-based efforts to encourage and support healthy eating, including through supporting teachers to integrate food and nutrition into classroom learning and developing good practice standards for healthy eating in school.	Some action
POL13	Food composition	Continue and re-emphasise the government's commitment to the Healthy Food Partnership, including resources to support implementation as well as independent monitoring and evaluation of progress and performance	The Healthy Food Partnership has established several working groups to address aspects of healthy eating and obesity. All groups regularly publish their activities, work plans and deliverables. As activities move into the implementation phase, a new Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group will be established.	Substantive action
POL14	Food provision	Revise the regulations for early childhood settings to include detailed requirements regarding the healthiness of foods provided and promoted, and provide resources to support implementation	A National Quality Framework (NQF) has been developed and implemented to provide a national approach to regulation, assessment and quality improvement for early childhood education and care services in Australia. The NQF includes standards relating to healthy lifestyles (Standard 2.1, Element 2.1.3). The feedAustralia program, funded by the Department of Health, is currently being implemented to facilitate child care services in providing nutritious and appropriate food and drinks to better meet the Australian Dietary Guidelines. As of June 2018, nearly 1000 Australian early childhood and education care service are using the feedAustralia online menu planning tool.	Substantive action
POL15	Food retail	Through the Healthy Food Partnership, explore voluntary initiatives to increase in-store availability of healthy foods and decrease in-store availability of unhealthy foods (e.g., in supermarkets, fast food outlets etc.)	The Healthy Food Partnership has explored voluntary initiatives to address the availability of healthy compared to less healthy in-store foods, through the activities of the Food Service Working Group. The group is developing a voluntary pledge-style scheme which will include pledges related to increasing fruit, vegetable and wholegrain intake in food service settings, and portion control strategies. Recommendations for the pledge scheme are online and the Department of Health is working to have the system ready for implementation in 2019.	Substantive action
POL16	Food provision	Provide funding and support to the States and Territories to support private sector companies to develop, implement and monitor health and wellbeing policies, adopting a national approach and building on the resources currently available	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action

B] Infrastructure support actions

	Domain	Recommended policy action	Progress in relation to recommended action	Assessment
INF1	Leadership	Establish obesity prevention as a national priority, with a national taskforce, sustained funding, regular and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of key measures, and regular reporting with respect to targets	In October 2018, the CHC agreed that a national strategy be developed on obesity with a strong focus on the primary and secondary prevention and social determinants of health, especially in relation to early childhood and rural / regional issues. The National Diabetes Strategy implementation plan, released December 2017, identifies several national priority actions for the Commonwealth Government that are related to obesity prevention. The National Strategic Framework for Chronic Conditions, released in May 2017, provides a national approach to guide planning, design and delivery of policies, strategies, actions and services to better address the prevention and management of chronic conditions in Australia.	Some action
INF2	Leadership	Develop a National Nutrition Policy, building on previous work. The Policy should be integrated with the National Strategic Framework for Chronic Conditions and National Diabetes Strategy; include strategies to reduce inequalities and target vulnerable populations; supported by long-term funding, with co-ordination across government	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
INF3	Monitoring and intelligence	Commit sustained funding and ongoing support for a comprehensive diet and nutrition survey conducted every 5-10 years	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
INF4	Leadership	Establish national population dietary intake targets, including reducing the proportion of discretionary food intake	The Australian Government Department of Health and the New Zealand Ministry of Health have revised the nutrient reference values for Suggested Dietary Target and Upper Level of Intake of sodium for adults, approved by the NHMRC. The NHMRC will undertake a review of the remaining nutrient reference values for sodium, due 2021.	Some action
INF5	Funding and resources	Ensure research funding allocation, including the MRFF, takes into account diseases and conditions with the highest burden, including an increase in research funding allocated to improving population nutrition and diet-related NCD prevention	In 2017-18, the MRFF announced \$10 million over 4 years in funding for the Australian Prevention Partnership Centre, to implement 10 new prevention projects. The 2018-19 budget included \$125 million in funding over 9 years towards chronic conditions research. The NHMRC 2017-18 corporate plan states that a substantial proportion of funding will be used to address National Health Priority Areas, which include obesity, with \$27.2 million and \$26.8 million allocated to obesity research in 2016 and 2017 respectively.	Substantive action
INF6	Support for communities	Develop and fund an ongoing obesity prevention or nutrition-focused social marketing campaign, implemented across a wide range of platforms, designed to support related policy initiatives	In August 2017, the Australian Sports Commission launched the Move it Aus campaign. This campaign was rolled out nationwide and promotes a more active lifestyle by encouraging all Australians to commit at least 30 minutes a day to physical activity. The campaign consists of a video and several related resources available through the Sports Australia website. This campaign does not include healthy eating.	Some action
INF7	Support for communities	Support nutrition education in schools and early childhood education by: integrating nutrition and cooking skills into the national curriculum for all years; embedding nutrition and the ADGs into learning outcomes assessment requirements; adequately training, accrediting and supporting teachers to provide nutrition information	The CHC has endorsed a joint statement with the COAG Education Council on healthy eating in school, and is collaborating with them to strengthen and increase the impact of school based efforts to encourage and support healthy eating, including through supporting teachers to integrate food and nutrition into classroom learning and developing good practice standards for healthy eating in school.	Some action
INF8	Funding and resources	Re-establish the Australian National Preventive Health Agency (or a similar independent agency), with a secure funding stream, to coordinate health promotion functions (including improving population nutrition) across jurisdictions	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action

INF9	Governance	Implement a health-in-all-policies framework nationally, with formal health impact assessments as part of policy development and proposal processes, including explicit details about the consideration of potential impacts of policies on population nutrition and health	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
INF10	Governance	Set clear guidelines for involvement of different stakeholders in policy development processes, ensuring that food industry representatives are not involved in setting policy objectives and agendas where they have conflicts of interest with improving population nutrition	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
INF11	Support for communities	Support community-based interventions to create healthy food environments by implementing and funding a national knowledge translation and exchange platform to provide advice, promote best practice, and offer networking opportunities	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
INF12	Support for communities	Provide additional resources to support increased understanding, use and uptake of the Australian Dietary Guidelines among the general public	The 'Eat for Health' website provides information and associated resources related to the Australian Dietary Guidelines and the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. Associated print resources to support consumers, health professionals and educators are made available free with over 750,000 Eat for Health print resources ordered and distributed each year. The Department of Health has engaged NHMRC to review and broadly consult on understanding of the term 'discretionary foods and drinks', to consider a more standardised approach to identifying these foods and drinks across multiple settings.	Some action
INF13	Leadership	Explicitly incorporate environmental sustainability in the next revision of the Australian Dietary Guidelines	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
INF14	Governance	Introduce requirements for stakeholders to declare potential conflicts of interest during public consultation processes regarding policy development and implementation	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
INF15	Monitoring and intelligence	Establish a consistent national approach to regular measuring of children's height and weight at key stages of primary and secondary schools, including 'opt-out' consent	This matter will be considered through the outcomes of the Senate Enquiry into the Obesity Epidemic in Australia. It will be further developed through the CHC agreed National Obesity Strategy.	Limited action
INF16	Governance	Implement measures to improve integration, dialogue and policy coherence across agriculture, health and trade, to ensure that public health and nutrition are explicit considerations during policy development processes	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
INF17	Governance	Modify the government lobby register to require more detailed reporting, including details of specific lobbying activities (such as when lobbying is occurring, who is involved, and the issues discussed)	The Australian Government Register of Lobbyists (the Register), and the associated information contained in the Register, is established in accordance with the requirements of the Lobbying Code of Conduct (the Code). The Code is an administrative initiative, not a regulatory regime, and has been consistently applied and continued by successive Governments since 2008. No relevant changes in reporting requirements have recently been made.	Limited action
INF18	Governance	Improve transparency of political donations by introducing online, real-time declaration of political donations over \$1,000, and apply these requirements nationally	The Government has introduced legislation reforming Australia's electoral disclosure laws. These laws will improve the transparency of political donations at the federal level. Australia has committed to investigating options for enhancing the timeliness and the accessibility of information relating to political donations and funding as part of its <i>Second Open Government National Action Plan 2018-2020</i> .	Some action

C] Other substantive actions

	Domain	Action
1	Leadership	<p>Select Committee into the Obesity Epidemic in Australia:</p> <p>On 16 May 2018, the Senate established a Select Committee into the Obesity Epidemic in Australia. This included an inquiry into numerous aspects of the obesity epidemic in Australia, with a particular focus on childhood obesity. The findings and recommendations of the Select Committee into the Obesity Epidemic in Australia were publicly released on the 5th December 2018.</p>
2	Leadership	<p>Opportunities for the Food Regulation System to support obesity prevention objectives:</p> <p>A Health and Food Collaboration (the Collaboration) has been established to assist in identifying opportunities for the Food Regulation System to support obesity prevention objectives. As part of this, a <i>Rapid Review of food regulatory approaches to address childhood obesity</i> was commissioned, feeding into a public health 'Policy Think Tank' to develop a shared understanding among the public health community about what can/cannot be achieved in the Food Regulation System (held 22 March 2018). The Collaboration has identified front-of-pack labelling as intersection between public health and the food regulatory system, and is planning an HSR symposium in the third quarter of 2019.</p>
3	Food labelling	<p>Labelling of sugars on packaged food and drinks:</p> <p>In November 2017, the Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation concluded that current information about sugars on labels is inadequate. Between July - September 2018, the Food Regulation Standing Committee undertook a public consultation on policy options in relation to the labelling of sugars on food and drinks. This included consultation on a number of policy options for labelling of sugars. Outcomes will be presented to the Forum in 2019.</p>
4	Food labelling	<p>Clarifying the policy issue in relation to naming sources of fats and oils:</p> <p>In November 2016, the Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation (the Forum) authorised a range of activities to clarify the labelling of sources of fats and oils. In June 2018, the Forum noted that in relation to public health, consumers' ability to identify saturated and/or mono and polyunsaturated fats in food is limited. They agreed that the Australian Government Department of Health request the NHMRC provide advice on the appropriate dietary guidance provided to consumers to assist them to choose healthy fats and oils.</p>
5	Food labelling	<p>Energy labelling of alcoholic beverages:</p> <p>In response to the 2011 Labelling Logic Review recommendation 'That energy content should be displayed on the labels of all alcoholic beverages, consistent with the requirements for other food products', the Forum requested further work into the energy labelling of alcoholic beverages. The Food Regulation Standing Committee released a consultation paper on the issue in June 2017, and held a number of stakeholder roundtables in mid-2017, the results of which were published. This information is now being used to develop policy options for wider public consultation.</p>

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For more details on the Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI) project go to: www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

