MEDIA RELEASE

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Poor diet findings underline calls for action on obesity now

The poor diet of many Australians, beginning in childhood, as revealed in a new official report, underlines the need for concerted national action on obesity, the Consumers Health Forum, said today.

The report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released today shows that Australians generally do not eat enough of the right food, like vegetables, and too much food rich in fat, salt and sugars.

“These findings again vindicate calls over the years by health and community groups for concerted action on obesity and at last, Australia’s health ministers have agreed to develop a national strategy to counter this huge public health challenge,” the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

“We welcome the decision by the COAG Health Ministers Council last week to develop a national plan on obesity.

“As this new AIHW report Nutrition across the life stages, shows, there is great scope for improving diets of most Australians of all ages. This includes children whose formative diets do not include enough vegetables, teenagers who tend to eat too much junk food and even those in middle age whose alcohol intake is often too high.

“It has taken too long to reach a national agreement for action on obesity. Now health ministers must move promptly to introduce effective measures.

“Governments have a ready-made blueprint for action, provided by the Obesity Policy Coalition’s report Tipping the Scales, which CHF strongly supported.

“After a comprehensive and expert investigation, that report proposed eight critical actions to tackle obesity. These included tougher restrictions on TV junk food advertising, food reformulation targets, mandatory Health Star ratings on food, an

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active transport strategy, public health education campaigns and a 20 per cent health levy on sugary drinks.

The Health Ministers considered a number of aspects relating to obesity. They agreed that the national strategy should have a strong focus on prevention measures and social determinants of health, especially in relation to early childhood and rural and regional issues.

The Consumers Health Forum has called for more effective measures to counter obesity over several years.

In January 2015, with the support of the Obesity Policy Coalition, the Heart Foundation and the Public Health Association of Australia, CHF released the results of an Essential Research poll showing strong community backing for national action on obesity.

That poll revealed that 79 per cent of Australians polled believed that if we don’t do more to lower the intake of fatty sugary and salty foods/drinks, our children will live shorter lives than their parents. Half of those polled then approved of the idea of a tax on junk food/sugary drinks.

“We called then for the Federal Government to take decisive action to stop the never-ending promotion of unhealthy food and drink, particularly to young people.

“Australia has lagged behind other nations in taking effective action against obesity which is one of the greatest triggers of chronic health problems which afflict a growing number of Australians.

Unless we act now to arrest this trend, it will add up to even greater demands on our health system as it attempts to manage the growing levels of chronic disease in the community.

“The time for talk is well past. We need action now,” Ms Wells said.

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