



Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments

**Scorecard and priority
recommendations for the
Australian Capital Territory
government**

February 2017

Further details available at
www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

ACT

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 the Commonwealth and State/Territory levels.

101 experts from 53 organisations assessed the extent to which governments in Australia are implementing globally recommended policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments.

Top 3

Things the ACT is doing well (with reference to international best practice)



Strong commitments to combat the rise of obesity and overweight in the ACT, with clear targets, detailed implementation plans and regular reporting



Sustained efforts to reduce promotion of unhealthy food in selected settings



Multiple initiatives to increase the healthiness of school food, mandatory restrictions on unhealthy foods in other government settings

Top 5



policy recommendations for the ACT

Food retail: expand existing initiatives to improve availability of healthy foods and limit availability of unhealthy foods in food retail outlets

1

Food promotion: continue efforts to restrict the promotion of unhealthy food and beverages in community and sports settings

2

Monitoring: actively monitor all aspects of food environments, with a focus on food in schools and public sector settings

3

School food: develop and implement healthy food provision guidelines for early childhood settings and non-government schools

4

Community education: continue efforts to improve population nutrition through community education and awareness raising strategies

5

Obesity and diet-related diseases in Australia are a public health crisis

Unhealthy diets and obesity are leading contributors to poor health and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Australia.¹

Almost 2 out of 3 (63%) Australian adults and 1 in 4 (25%) Australian children are overweight or obese.² The costs associated with overweight and obesity have been estimated at over \$56 billion each year.³

Comprehensive government policy action is needed

Addressing obesity and improving population diets requires a comprehensive government response at Commonwealth and State/Territory levels.

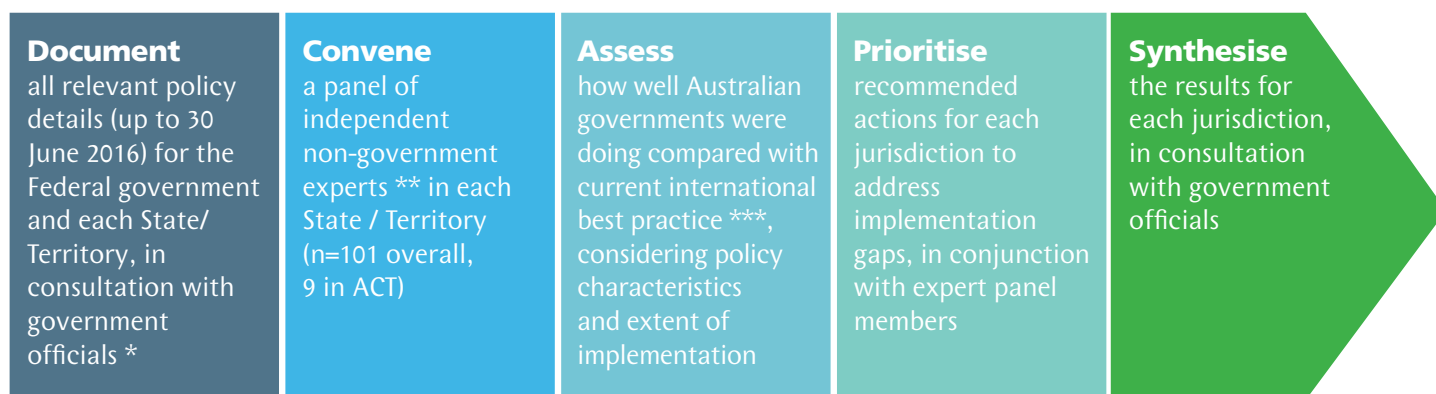
This project aimed to assess the extent to which governments in Australia are implementing globally recommended policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments, and identify prioritised actions for each government.

Food Policy Index

A Food Policy Index was developed for Australia to assess the food- and diet-related policies that are in place and identify gaps. This was based on the Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI)⁴ that was developed by INFORMAS⁵, an international network of experts in food policy, and has been applied in several countries.

The Food-EPI covers all of the key policies in this area, including specific aspects of food environments (such as food composition, labelling, promotion, prices and provision) that have been shown to have an important impact on population diets and obesity, and infrastructure support (including leadership, governance, monitoring and funding) that helps facilitate effective policy implementation.

Process for assessing extent of policy implementation in Australia



¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016. Australian Burden of Disease Study (2011)

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; 2017: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/overweight-and-obesity/>

³ Colagiuri S, et al. The cost of overweight and obesity in Australia. MJA 2010; 192 (5):260-264

⁴ Swinburn B, et al. Monitoring and benchmarking government policies and actions to improve the healthiness of food environments: the government healthy food environment policy index. *Obesity Reviews* 2013; 14 Suppl 1:24-37

⁵ International Network for Food and Obesity/NCDs Research, Monitoring and Action Support

* Detailed summaries of each government's policy details are available at www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

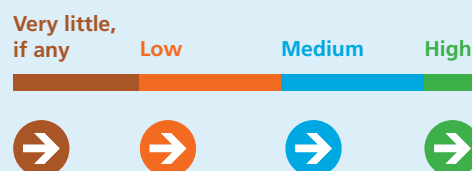
** Panel members included academics, nutritionists, and senior representatives from health NGOs and community groups with expertise in population nutrition and / or obesity prevention

*** Global benchmarks as identified by INFORMAS. As more countries complete the Food-EPI assessment process and new evidence of policy action emerges, benchmarks are likely to change, informing future iterations of the tool. The Federal government and each State/Territory were assessed separately; however, in some policy areas, policy development involves collaboration between Federal and State/Territory governments, and implementation of national guidance and policy is at the discretion of each jurisdiction.

Scorecard for the ACT



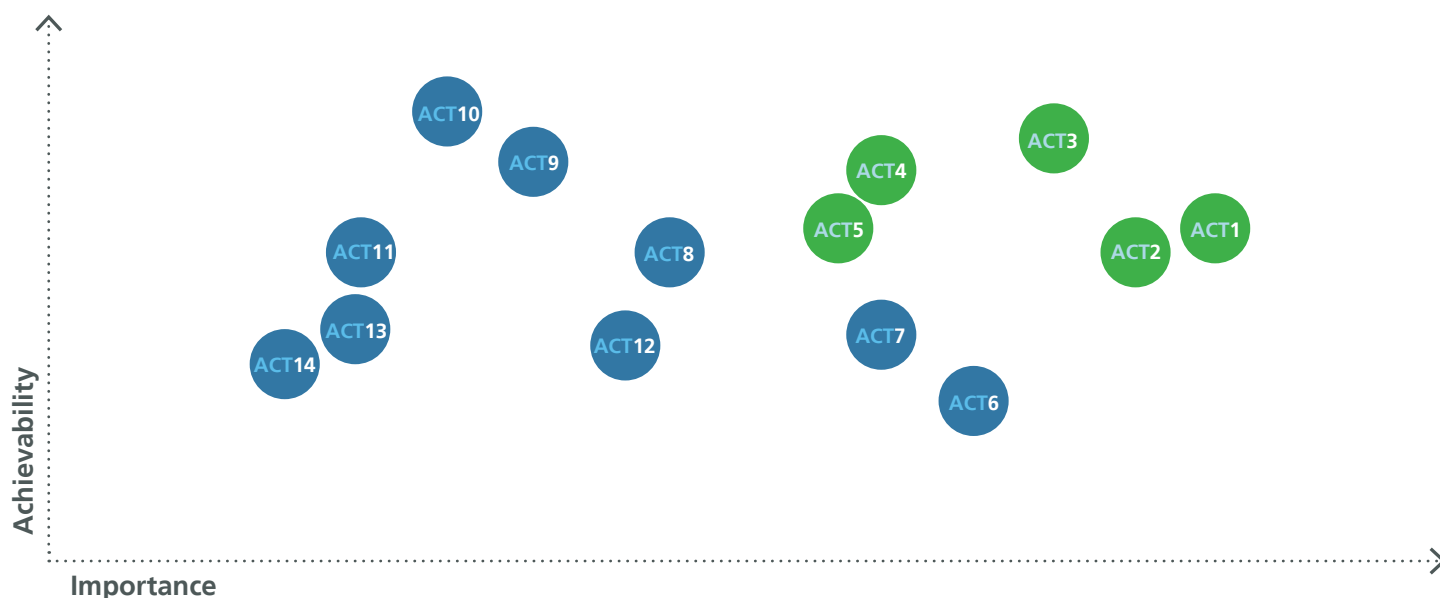
Expert panel's assessment of the ACT's level of implementation (up to 30 June 2016) of key policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments



Category	Policy	Implementation Level
Food labelling	Menu labelling	High
Food promotion	Restrict promotion of unhealthy food in non-broadcast media	Medium
	Restrict promotion of unhealthy food in children's settings	Medium
Food provision	Policies in schools promote healthy food choices	High
	Policies in public settings promote healthy food choices	Medium
	Support and training systems for public sector settings	Medium
	Support and training systems for private companies	Medium
Food retail	Planning policies and zoning laws: unhealthy foods	Low
	Planning policies and zoning laws: healthy foods	Low
	Retail store availability of healthy and unhealthy foods	Low
	Food service outlet availability of healthy and unhealthy foods	Low
Leadership	Strong, visible, political support for population nutrition	High
	Comprehensive implementation plan linked to state/national needs	High
	Priorities for reducing inequalities related to nutrition	Medium
Governance	Restricting commercial influence on policy development	Medium
	Transparency and access to government information	High
	Assessing the potential health impacts of all policies	Medium
Monitoring & intelligence	Monitoring food environments	Medium
	Monitoring population nutrition intakes	Medium
	Monitoring population body weight	High
	Evaluation of major programs and policies	Medium
Funding & resources	Research funding for obesity & NCD prevention	Medium
	Independent health promotion agency	Very little, if any
Support for communities	Mechanisms to support community-based interventions	Low
	Implementation of social marketing campaigns	Medium
	Food and nutrition in education curricula	High

Prioritised recommended actions for the ACT government

	Domain	Recommended policy action
ACT1	Food retail	Expand existing work with retailers and food service outlets to improve in-store availability of healthy foods and limit availability and sales of unhealthy foods
ACT2	Food promotion	Continue demonstrating leadership in implementing mechanisms to restrict the promotion of unhealthy food and beverages in community and sports settings, and particularly in children's settings
ACT3	Monitoring and intelligence	Implement ongoing monitoring of food environments, with a particular focus on the nutritional quality of food provided / available in early childcare settings, schools, and public sector settings (such as hospitals, workplaces, community and sports centres)
ACT4	Food provision	Develop and implement healthy food provision guidelines for early childhood settings and non-government schools
ACT5	Support for communities	Continue efforts to improve population nutrition through community education and awareness raising strategies
ACT6	Governance	Implement 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
ACT7	Food retail	Investigate options for amending the Territory Plan and associated planning controls to decrease access to unhealthy take-away foods (e.g., limiting density of outlets, restricting placement of outlets near schools) and increasing access to healthy food outlets
ACT8	Food promotion	Require all organisations, such as community groups and sports clubs, that receive funding from the ACT government to restrict all promotion (including sponsorship) related to unhealthy food and beverages as a condition of receiving funding
ACT9	Support for communities	Put in place community-wide structures, with associated resources, to provide broad and coordinated support for community-based interventions designed to create and maintain healthy food environments across multiple settings
ACT10	Monitoring and intelligence	Provide funding for oversampling for the ACT in the triennial National Health Survey for the purposes of monitoring BMI and key nutrition indicators of children and adults
ACT11	Food labelling	Enhance existing menu labelling regulations by requiring outlets to display interpretive nutrition labelling (broader than kilojoule labelling), potentially through adaptation of the Health Star Rating scheme
ACT12	Monitoring and intelligence	Introduce regular measuring of children's height and weight at key stages of primary and secondary schools, on an 'opt-out' consent basis
ACT13	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)
ACT14	Governance	Improve transparency of political donations by introducing real-time declaration of political donations



Recommended actions were developed by panel members, and prioritised taking into account their perceptions of the relative importance (including perceived need, likely impact and equity) and achievability (including feasibility, level of acceptability to a wide range of key stakeholders, affordability and cost-effectiveness) of each action

Benchmarks of good practice Policy actions targeting food environments

Domain	Policy area	International best practise (as identified by INFORMAS)	Leading State / Territory in Australia (as per assessments as part of this project)
Food labelling	Menu labelling	South Korea All fast-food outlets required to display detailed nutrition information (incl. energy, total sugars, protein, saturated fat and sodium) on menus	ACT/NSW/QLD/SA Large fast food chains required to display average energy content on menus and overall average daily energy intake. NSW supports continued monitoring and evaluation of menu labelling
Food promotion	Restrict promotion of unhealthy food in non-broadcast media	Quebec, Canada Ban on all commercial advertising directed to children (under 13 years) through any medium	ACT Advertising of unhealthy food on government-run buses is restricted, other options under consideration
	Restrict promotion of unhealthy food in children's settings	Spain Legislation requires that kindergartens and schools are free from all advertising	ACT Advertising and promotion of red/amber foods or drinks is restricted at ACT Health facilities and activities. ACT actively exploring options that reduce promotion of unhealthy foods in children's settings
Food provision	Policies in schools promote healthy food choices	UK Mandatory nutritional standards for all food served in schools -restrictions on high fat/sugar/salt/processed foods	All states and territories have policies for healthy school food provision. ACT has several initiatives designed to increase policy compliance, including a requirement for license agreements with canteen operators and active monitoring. WA requires principals to develop whole-of-school food provision policies
	Policies in public settings promote healthy food choices	New York City, USA Mandatory nutritional standards for all food purchased/sold by city agencies (hospitals, prisons, aged care, health facilities)	ACT Mandatory restrictions on the sale/promotion/placement of unhealthy foods in ACT Health facilities, policies and commitments to improve healthy food choices in all government workplaces and facilities
	Support and training systems for public sector settings	Japan Mandatory oversight and monitoring by dietitian/nutritionist (incl. menu development) for all government facilities providing >250 meals/day	VIC Healthy Eating Advisory Service (HEAS) provides a wide range of resources to support settings such as childcare centres, schools, health services, and sports centres to provide healthy foods and drinks
	Support and training systems for private companies	UK Responsibility Deal included collective pledges for health at work, including a focus on healthier staff restaurants - over 160 signatories	WA The Healthier Workplace WA program provides a number of free services to support workplaces state-wide to make cultural, environmental and policy changes that support and encourage positive lifestyle behaviours amongst employees
Food retail	Planning policies and zoning laws: unhealthy foods	South Korea 'Green Food Zones' around schools (200 metre radius) in which sales of 'unhealthy' foods are prohibited	QLD Incorporates health as a key consideration as part of the Planning Act, and provides detailed resources (Active Healthy Communities) for local councils on ways to limit access to unhealthy fast food outlets
	Planning policies and zoning laws: healthy foods	USA Provision of grants for states to provide financial/other types of assistance to attract healthier retail outlets to underserved areas	QLD Provides detailed information and resources (Active Healthy Communities) for local government on ways to promote healthy food choices through the built environment and encourage outlets that sell healthy food
	In-store availability of healthy and unhealthy foods	UK Agreement to increase availability of fruit and vegetables at convenience stores, and commitments (as part of the Responsibility Deal) to decrease availability of confectionery at supermarket checkouts	NT Ongoing formal commitment to support selected remote community stores in encouraging in-store availability of healthy foods and discouraging availability of unhealthy foods
	Food service outlet availability of healthy and unhealthy foods	Singapore Government partnership ('Healthier Hawker' program) with selected food vendors to improve healthiness of take-away food	SA South Australian Premier's Healthy Kids Menus Initiative aims to increase the provision of and access to healthy menu options for children in South Australian restaurants, cafes, hotels and clubs

Benchmarks of good practice Infrastructure support actions

Domain	Policy area	International best practise (as identified by INFORMAS)	Leading State / Territory in Australia (as per assessments as part of this project)
Leadership	Strong, visible, political support for population nutrition	New York City, USA Mayor (Michael Bloomberg) showed strong political leadership in introducing landmark food policies, including restrictions on trans-fat and portion size restrictions on sugary-drinks	ACT Healthy Weight Initiative is a whole of government initiative to combat the rise of obesity and overweight in the ACT, led by the Chief Minister with regular reporting of progress
	Comprehensive implementation plan linked to state/national needs	European Union The European Food and Nutrition Action Plan 2015-20 outlines clear strategic goals, guiding principles, objectives, priorities and tools	ACT The 'Towards Zero Growth: Healthy Weight Action Plan' (the HWAP) outlines clear targets for obesity rates, details a range of policy and program initiatives across health and non-health sectors, with a taskforce and dedicated implementation groups established
	Priorities for reducing inequalities related to nutrition	New Zealand Ministry of Health upholds contracts with NGOs/other institutions to prioritise Maori health and Maori specific needs in service delivery, service development and planning	WA Key strategic health promotion documents identify priority groups, WA government has highlighted a strategic focus on improving nutrition in vulnerable groups, several targeted initiatives
Governance	Restricting commercial influence on policy development	USA Mandatory and publicly accessible lobby registers – including extensive reporting of nature of lobbying activities	QLD Lobby register includes mandatory reporting of the type and purpose of lobbying conduct, real-time disclosure of political donations
	Transparency and access to government information	Australia Open access principles across governments, FSANZ processes for extensive stakeholder engagement in the development of new standards	All governments across Australia have open data policies, frameworks for information access, and policies and procedures that ensure transparency
	Assessing the potential health impacts of all policies	SA, Australia Mechanisms to incorporate population health considerations into policy development processes across the South Australian government	SA Mechanisms to incorporate population health considerations into policy development processes across the South Australian government
Monitoring and intelligence	Monitoring food environments	New Zealand Comprehensive database of nutrient information for different foods, continued monitoring of school food environments nationwide	ACT Extensive monitoring of unhealthy food marketing to children, and nutritional quality of food in public sector settings
	Monitoring population nutrition intake	USA National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), conducted annually, provides detailed national information on health status, disease history and nutritional intake of adults and children	WA Health and Wellbeing Surveillance System collects annual data on key nutrition indicators, Nutrition Monitoring Survey series collects data every three years on community perceptions and attitudes around nutrition
	Monitoring population body weight	UK National Child Measurement Program for children's BMI, assessing children ages 4-6 and 10-11	ACT/NSW/QLD/SA Regular surveys of self-reported BMI from adults and children
	Evaluation of major programs and policies	USA The National Institutes for Health (NIH) provides dedicated funding for research that evaluates new policies/programs expected to influence obesity related behaviours	QLD Health and Wellbeing Strategy outlines key evaluation questions, with associated guidelines - specific evaluation framework under development. All programs required to conduct evaluations
Funding and resources	Research funding for obesity & NCD prevention	New Zealand Approximately 11% of the Health Research Council's total budget of \$70M spent on population nutrition and/or prevention of obesity and NCDs	NT/WA Provides sustained funding for research that improves foods environments, reduces obesity, NCDs and their related inequalities
	Independent health promotion agency	Victoria, Australia VicHealth is an independent statutory health promotion agency	VIC/WA Independent statutory health promotion agencies, include an objective to improve population nutrition
Support for communities	Mechanisms to support community-based interventions	Australia Previous National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health (now defunct) provided State and Territory level support for initiatives aimed at obesity and NCD prevention	VIC Multiple targeted strategies, policies and initiatives at state and local level designed to create healthier food environments (schools, childcare centres, workplaces, food outlets, sporting clubs, businesses and local government)
	Implementation of social marketing campaigns	Multiple international examples	WA Funds several obesity and NCD prevention social marketing campaigns, online and community programs, including LiveLighter that has now been adopted in multiple states / territories
	Food and nutrition in education curricula	UK National framework for core food competency skills and knowledge in children ages 5-16 years	ACT/WA Ongoing support and provision of resources to educators for the inclusion of food and nutrition in school curricula

Acknowledgements

This project was conducted by researchers within the Global Obesity Centre, a WHO Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention, at Deakin University. This research has been supported by The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre, funded by the NHMRC, the Australian Government Department of Health, the NSW Ministry of Health, ACT Health and the HCF Research Foundation, and administered and hosted by the Sax Institute.

The project forms part of INFORMAS (International Network for Food and Obesity/NCDs Research, Monitoring and Action Support), a global network of public-interest organisations and researchers that seek to monitor and benchmark public and private sector actions to create healthy food environments and reduce obesity and NCDs globally. The project team was led by Dr Gary Sacks, with research assistance provided by Emily Hadgkiss, Karen Peterson and Brydie Clarke. A steering committee, made up of Prof Sharon Friel, Prof Amanda Lee, Jane Martin, Prof Anna Peeters, Prof Boyd Swinburn and Dr Stefanie Vandevijvere, provided overall guidance to the project. Erica Nixon, Andrew Hogan and Bronwyn Wilkes provided assistance in coordinating ACT government input into the project.

Experts from the following organisations contributed to the assessment of the ACT government: Australian National University, Cancer Council ACT, Heart Foundation (National), Heart Foundation ACT, Nutrition Australia.

Cite this report as: Sacks G for the Food-EPI Australia project team. Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments: scorecard and priority recommendations for the Australian Capital Territory government. Melbourne: Deakin University, 2017.

The contents of this published material are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not reflect the views of the NHMRC or funding partners. The research was approved by the Human Ethics Advisory Group of the Faculty of Health at Deakin University, project number HEAG-H 162_2015.