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Dr Sophie Scamps introduces bill to ban junk food marketing in bid to tackle childhood obesity

Independent MP for Mackellar Dr Sophie Scamps will today table a Private Members Bill which would see a ban and time restrictions placed on junk food marketing on TV, radio, social media, and other online environments.

The Healthy Kids Advertising Bill 2023 (the Bill) aims to protect children from junk food marketing by removing ads from TV and radio between the hours of 6am and 930pm. The Bill would also place an outright ban on junk food marketing on social media and other online environments. Under the regulations, substantial fines would be imposed on broadcasters, internet service providers, and food companies that fail to adhere to the guidelines.

Dr Scamps, a former GP and emergency room doctor, said she was compelled to act due to the increasing prevalence of childhood obesity and chronic disease, with obesity estimated to cost the health system $11.8 billion every year. Dr Scamps also said a large number of parents in her Mackellar electorate had raised concerns about the predatory targeting of their children by junk food companies.

“Right now a quarter of our children are already on the path to chronic disease because they are over the healthy weight range” said Dr Scamps MP.

“We know our children are exposed to over 800 junk food ads on TV alone every year¹, and that there is a direct link between those ads and childhood obesity². The current restrictions are not strong enough, and self-regulation is just not working.”

“If we continue to stand by while children are deluged by junk food advertising on social media and on TV, then we are failing them,” said Dr Scamps MP.

The Bill will be seconded by Independent MP and former paediatrician Dr Monique Ryan, and also has the support of the Australian Medical Association (AMA), Dietitians Australia, the Cancer Council, the Food for Health Alliance, the Public Health Association of Australia, The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP), The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), and the Heart Foundation.

Research conducted by the Australia Institute earlier in late 2022³ also shows strong public support for regulating unhealthy food marketing, with two-thirds (66%) backing a ban on junk food advertising.

“Approximately 40 countries around the world, including the UK, Ireland, Chile, Norway, Mexico, Thailand, and South Korea, already have or are planning to regulate junk food advertising. I want to see Australia join this list,” said Dr. Scamps MP.

“At a time when our health system is under strain, investing in preventative health measures to combat the rising cost of chronic disease is plain common sense. The National Obesity Strategy found obesity costs our health system $11.8 billion every year and this figure will only grow if nothing is done.”

“I’ve been heartened by conversations I’ve had with members of the Albanese Government as well as public comments made by the Communications Minister, and believe there is genuine political will to address this issue. Protecting our children from obesity and a potential future of chronic disease is something all sides of politics can get behind.”

“Regulating junk food adverts on our TV screens and in our social media feeds will have a direct impact on the dietary decisions of Australians – including our kids – and can help both reduce childhood obesity and the incidence of chronic diseases,” said Dr Scamps MP.

Dr Scamps’ Bill has been developed in consultation with public health and marketing experts from across the country. It does not cover print or outdoor advertising, sport sponsorship, nor content shared by food and beverage companies on their own websites and social media channels.

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For an interview with Dr Sophie Scamps MP, contact Chris Williams:
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EDITORS NOTES

Quote from Professor Steve Robson, President – Australian Medical Association (AMA):

“With about one half of all Australians having at least one chronic disease, it’s time we took some preventative action. Banning junk food advertising on television is an important measure, one that will decrease the impact junk food advertisers have on impressionable young minds.”

Quote from Dr James Best, RACGP Specific Interests Chair Child and Young Person’s Health:

“The RACGP supports stronger regulation on junk food marketing. Junk food contributes to serious health issues including obesity and chronic disease, but currently companies have free reign to market them to children and young people with zero regard for the long-term impacts on health and wellbeing. Some 40 other countries have already implemented or are planning to implement regulations to protect children from pervasive junk food marketing, it’s time for Australia to put our children’s health first and do the same.”

Quote from Adjunct Professor Terry Slevin, CEO – Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA):

“The Public Health Association welcomes Dr Scamps’ Prohibition of Unhealthy Food Marketing Bill because junk food companies don’t spend their marketing dollars lightly. This bill will help parents and carers who are trying to ensure the children in their lives see fewer junk food ads, and that’s why we support it.”

Quote from Jane Martin, Executive Manager – Food for Health Alliance:

"Our children deserve a healthier future, free from the constant bombardment of junk food marketing. Regulation to restrict unhealthy food marketing on TV and radio during set times and via online platforms is a critical first step towards safeguarding our children’s health and wellbeing now and into the future."
Our community also supports action, with seventy percent of Australians agreeing that government should protect children from the marketing of unhealthy food. It's time to put our kids' health ahead of the profits of the processed food and advertising industries."

**Quote from Professor Nitin Kapur, President – RACP Paediatrics and Child Health Division**

“Children are exposed to predatory marketing of junk food and sugary drink across multiple mediums. Kids are being exposed to almost 200 junk food and drink promotions a week across TV and online platforms. We need the Australian Government to intervene and regulate junk food advertising for the sake of our children’s health now and into the future. Childhood obesity can cause lifelong complications, including for the cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, respiratory, dental, and neurological systems.”

**Quote from Clare Hughes, Chair of Cancer Council’s Nutrition, Alcohol and Physical Activity Committee:**

“Cancer Council applauds the proposed Bill for prioritising the future of our children’s health by addressing the impact of unhealthy food marketing. The evidence shows that children’s exposure to unhealthy food marketing influences what foods and drinks they want to consume, and it can shape their perception of what a healthy diet looks like. Research shows that industry codes are full of loopholes that fail to protect children from the unhealthy influence of food marketing. Promotion drives consumption, and this can lead to obesity and increased risk of 13 different types of cancer and other serious disease later in life. We all want our children to enjoy a healthy childhood and long life afterwards; Cancer Council hopes to see the Bill come to fruition so we can better protect our children from the harmful effects of unhealthy food marketing.”

**Quote from Robert Hunt, CEO – Dietitians Australia:**

“It is incredibly challenging to make healthy and nutritious choices when you are being bombarded with junk food advertising across the airwaves. Australian families and their children deserve to live in a country that supports healthy nutritious choices around food.

This bill will go a long way towards achieving this. We need policies that protect the future of Australia’s most precious commodity – the health and wellbeing of our children. Good nutrition is the foundation for a high-quality life. Currently – 38 percent of the Australian diet is made up of discretionary choices – or “junk food”. We need to turn this around, we need to see whole, nutritious foods making up the bulk of what Australians eat.”

**Quote from Jemma O’Hanlon, Senior Food and Nutrition Advisor – Heart Foundation:**

“Our kids are being influenced by junk food wherever they go, be that waiting at the bus stop, playing team sport or scrolling on their phones. We need to protect our kids and to do this we need tighter regulation. Junk food ads influence our behaviour to eat more junk food, which increases our risk of heart disease. As heart disease is the leading cause of death in Australia, we must take urgent action to protect our kids.”

**Quote from Rebecca Zosel, Executive Officer – Australian Health Promotion Association (AHPA):**

“We commend Dr Sophie Scamps’ leadership in putting forward the Healthy Kids Advertising Bill. Sophie’s draft Bill prioritises the health of children over the profits of unhealthy food industries. It will help to protect children from exposure to junk food advertising and create healthier environments for children to live, learn and play in.”
Quote from Professor Simone Pettigrew, Program Head, Food Policy – The George Institute for Global Health:

“We know that kids are increasingly exposed to junk food marketing online and via social media and have serious concerns about the lifelong impacts to health from unhealthy diets. In Australia, almost half the population suffers from chronic disease – a healthy diet is the foundation of preventing diseases such as obesity, heart disease, type-2 diabetes and some cancers. This Bill is an important step forward in regulating junk food advertising and we commend Dr Scamps for bringing it forward.”

Quote from Lucy Westerman, Executive Officer – The Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (ACDPA):

“The Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (ACDPA) welcomes Dr Scamps’ ‘Healthy Kids Advertising Bill’, a measure which can help ensure the spaces young people spend their time help them to be healthy and thrive by reducing their exposure to unhealthy food and drinks marketing. Unhealthy food and drink marketing is prominent in children’s lives, influencing food choices and contributing to illness in the short and long term. More than 12 million Australians live with one or more chronic disease, with unhealthy diet among the leading contributors to chronic disease burden. Removing the spotlight from unhealthy food and drinks by reducing children’s exposure to harmful marketing is a policy aspiration of the National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030. With nearly 40% of chronic disease burden preventable, ACDPA supports accelerated government action and investment in prevention, including strong policies that help create healthier environments for children. Taking unhealthy food out of the spotlight for children will help improve the health and wellbeing of all Australians at all stages of life.”

Quote from Justine Cain, CEO – Diabetes Australia:

“A child who watches 80 minutes of television per day will see around 800 junk food advertisements a year. The advertisements are designed to encourage children to make unhealthy food choices that can lead to weight gain and ultimately set children up for unhealthy lives and a greater risk of serious chronic conditions like type 2 diabetes. As a community we need to do more to protect our children from the very serious chronic conditions that can result from regular unhealthy food choices. Together we can affect change.”

Quote from Dr Rosemary Stanton AO, Senior Visiting Fellow – School of Medical Sciences, UNSW:

“Children should not be ‘fair game’ for advertisers. Young children can’t tell the difference between a program and an ad. And when they get a taste for unhealthy foods and drinks, their ‘pester power’ will wear down even the strongest parents. By primary school age, children may be able to recognise an ad, but most lack the ability to understand the intent of persuasion. Adolescents’ brains are wired to seek reward, and they respond to marketing cues, and spread their eating and drinking habits to their peers.

Unhealthy foods then take the place of healthier products: By 2-3 years of age, 30% of children’s kilojoules come from unhealthy foods. By age 14, it’s a massive 41% of the day's kilojoules. ABS data shows only 8.5% of children aged 2-17 years meet the recommended intake of these healthy foods. I commend Dr Scamp’s Bill – it’s vital for the health of our children.”