

Acknowledgements

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- South Australia Health for presenter expenses (Dr Jenkins)

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Background

In October 2016, the Council of Australian Government's Health Council (Health Ministers) discussed the issue of childhood obesity and considered collective action that could improve children's health by limiting the promotion and availability of unhealthy food and drinks.

Ministers agreed to actions that could be taken to limit the impact of unhealthy food and drinks on children and to consult with Ministers in other portfolios to collaboratively develop joint approaches.

Schools, sport and recreation, and public healthcare facilities are the focus of the national childhood obesity prevention project, as well as potential enhancements for the food regulation system and determining foods and drinks that are not suitable for promotion to children.

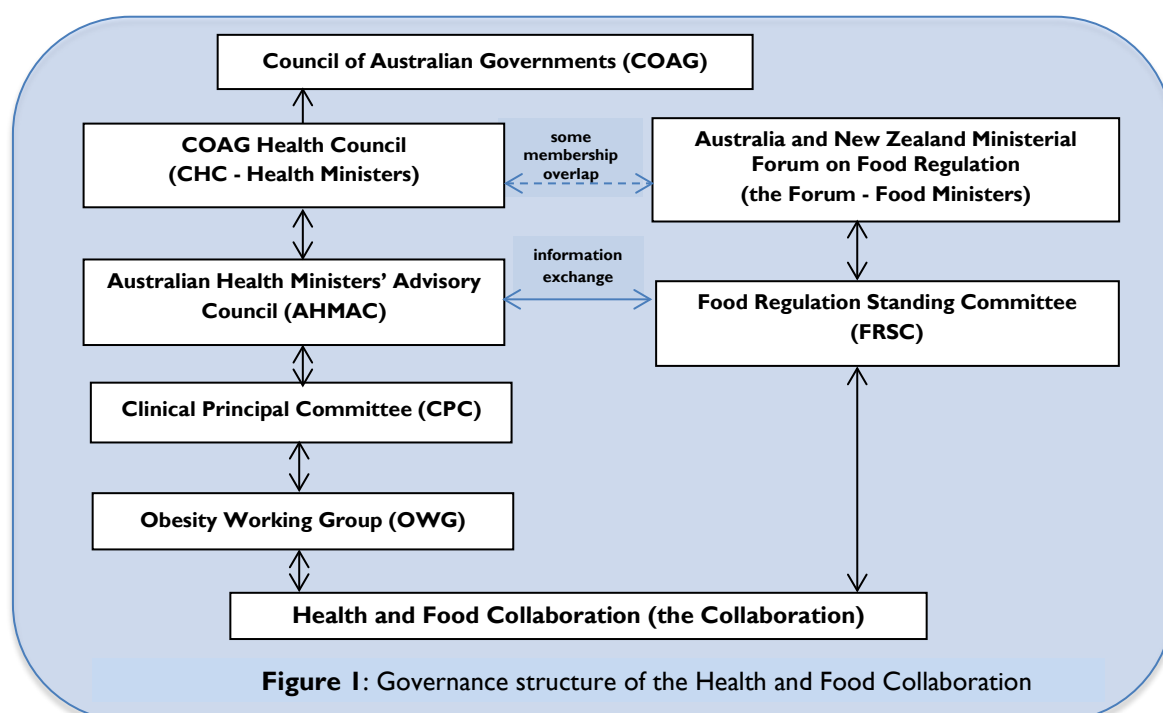
One of the current three key priorities for the Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation (Food Ministers) is to support *the public health objectives to reduce chronic disease related to overweight and obesity*.

This aim aligns with the Health Ministers' interest in enhancements for the food regulation system to address childhood obesity.

In November 2016, Food Ministers considered correspondence from Health Ministers that sought support for identifying potential new food regulation initiatives to influence healthy eating and address obesity.

In response, a small time-limited senior government official's group, the Health and Food Collaboration (the Collaboration), was established to enhance communication and co-operation between Health Ministers, Food Ministers, and their subordinate committees.

The Collaboration's role is to identify strategies related to food regulation that can be considered by, and jointly championed through, the appropriate government committee structures, and recommended to Health and Food Ministers for further consideration. The Collaboration is not a decision-making body.



The Collaboration's role includes identifying opportunities for the food regulation system to support obesity prevention objectives. As part of this work the Collaboration:

- commissioned a *Rapid Review* of food regulatory approaches to address childhood obesity
- hosted a *Policy Think Tank* to help develop a shared understanding among the public health community (including government, academic, non-government sectors and relevant professional associations) what is, and what is not, possible to achieve in relation to obesity prevention from within the food regulatory system

The *Policy Think Tank - opportunities for the food regulation system to support obesity prevention* was held on 22 March 2018 in Melbourne. This summary report provides an overview of the *Policy Think Tank*, and the insights gained.

Objectives

The specific objects for the *Policy Think Tank* were to:

- share and consider the findings of a rapid review on regulatory approaches to address childhood obesity
- increase understanding of the Food Regulation Policy Framework and the full range of food regulatory system options available (regulatory, co-regulatory, voluntary and codes of practice)
- explore and critique other potential actions, including creative ideas from participants
- prioritise potential actions that could be further considered subject to consultation with broader stakeholders including food industry and consumer groups

Participants

The *Policy Think Tank* invitees included those from the government, academic, and non-government sectors including health professional associations. It was an opportunity for the public health community to gain a better understanding of food regulatory processes and for government food regulators to gain greater insight into the concerns of the broader public health community.

A total 100 people were invited to the *Policy Think Tank* of which 70 attended. This included:

- government health sector decision-makers/managers (n=11)
- government food policy/regulators (n=17)
- government nutrition policy/practitioners (n=16)
- nutrition academics (n=13)
- non-government nutrition advocates from NGOs and professional associations (n=13)

Strategy

The *Policy Think Tank* comprised scene setting presentations and a series of workshopped activities. The activities were led by a professional facilitator with experience in bringing together diverse groups around a common goal.

Three short presentations set the scene for the *Policy Think Tank*.

- Professor Amanda Lee, an eminent public health nutritionist from the Sax Institute's Australian Prevention Partnership Centre, outlined the imperative for action on healthy eating. Professor Lee highlighted the importance of diet as a major risk factor for the burden of disease in Australia and New Zealand and the size of the problem with increasing rates of overweight and obesity and poor diets having become the norm.

- Dr Helen Vidgen, an expert nutrition researcher from Queensland University of Technology gave an overview of the commissioned rapid review on regulatory approaches to address childhood obesity which is summarised in the *Insights* section below.
- Dr Fay Jenkins, Director, Food and Controlled Drugs Branch, Public Health Services, SA Health explained how the food regulatory system works in Australia and New Zealand. Dr Jenkins outlined the elements of the Food Regulation System in Australia and New Zealand including stakeholder groups, support frameworks and policy development processes.

Insights

Rapid Review

The Rapid Review provided a comprehensive summary of international experience of food regulatory initiatives that aim to support obesity prevention. Key initiatives focus on:

- the food industry environment
 - food processing (e.g. reformulation and nutrient targets)
 - food retail (e.g. portions size)
 - food labelling and advertising (e.g. warning labels, mandatory nutrient labelling)
- the consumer food environment
 - food availability (e.g. restricting sale of unhealthy food items)
 - food marketing/promotion (e.g. marketing restrictions of unhealthy foods and drinks in certain settings)

Key findings of the Rapid Review include:

- food regulation has been used widely to address childhood obesity
- mandatory implementation approaches are considered best practice
- voluntary regulations/commitments, self-regulation, voluntary compliance or public-private partnerships result in weaker policy implementation and population impact than mandatory approaches
- regulatory approaches are most effective when part of a suite of related strategies
- evaluation research is needed to inform the development of regulatory practice to address childhood obesity.

Workshop activities

Participants explored obesity prevention in the context of the *current* food regulatory system with common descriptive themes emerging:

- obesogenic environment where unhealthy foods predominate
- inadequate investment in prevention
- inconsistencies across government portfolios
- health outcomes given insufficient consideration in food regulatory decisions with a preference for non-regulatory approaches.

A *shared vision for the future* was also explored with common themes including:

- healthy food being the easy choice
- high food literacy
- support for and investment in prevention
- effective food regulation to drive better health outcomes

There was also recognition that adopting a Trans-Tasman approach for proposed new actions would strengthen effectiveness, efficiency and longevity of actions especially given the bi-national food regulatory system.

A series of potential actions were explored by participants with four key themes emerging where participants felt future effort could be directed in the short to medium term including:

- clearer definitions of unhealthy (discretionary) food
- food reformulation and portion sizes
- Health Star Rating system improvements
- marketing restrictions for unhealthy (discretionary) foods

Evaluation survey

An evaluation survey was completed by 51 participants with key findings that:

- over half of the respondents (n=26) agreed or strongly agreed the *Policy Think Tank* provided an opportunity share and consider the findings of a rapid review on regulatory approaches to address childhood obesity with a further
- the majority of respondents (n=44) agreed or strongly agreed the *Policy Think Tank* increased understanding of the Food Regulation Policy Framework and the food regulatory system
- two thirds of the respondents (n=31) agreed or strongly agreed the *Policy Think Tank* provided an opportunity to explore and critique other potential food regulatory system activities to address childhood obesity

Conclusion and Next Steps

The *Policy Think Tank* provided a useful opportunity to increase understanding of the food regulatory system within the public health community in Australia and New Zealand. It also helped to identify the common ground between participants from different professional groups.

The findings of the Rapid Review and the workshop outcomes of the *Policy Think Tank* offer an indication of where international experience and the *Policy Think Tank* participants believe there is capacity for more action in the short to medium term.

The next step is for the Health and Food Collaboration and the Food Regulation Standing Committee to consider this report, in conjunction with the Rapid Review of Food Regulatory Approaches to Address Childhood Obesity. It is anticipated that some of the issues that emerged through the *Policy Think Tank* may be able to be addressed through existing processes such as:

- food labelling work within the Food Regulatory System
- the 5 year review of the Health Star Rating System
- the COAG Health Council's actions on limiting the impact of unhealthy food and drink on children
- the Australian Government's Healthy Food Partnership

Consideration of other initiatives will require further discussion through the usual Food Regulation Policy Framework process and involve broader consultation with all interested stakeholder groups.

Appendix I: Participant List

Dr	Kathryn	Backholer	Global Obesity Centre (GLOBE), Deakin University
Dr	Phillip	Baker	Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition, Deakin University
Mr	Mark	Booth	Food Standards Australia New Zealand
Ms	Louise	Broomhead	Department of Health, Australian Capital Territory
A/Prof	Kevin	Buckett	South Australia Health
Ms	Annette	Byron	Dietitians Association of Australia
Ms	Jo	Cammins	Department of Health, South Australia
Dr	Milena	Canil	Department of Health and Human Services, Victoria
Dr	Harriette	Carr	Ministry of Health, New Zealand
Ms	Kathy	Chapman	University of Sydney
Ms	Meredith	Claremont	Ministry of Health, New South Wales
Ms	Erica	Clifford	Department of Health and Human Services, Victoria
Ms	Megan	Cobcroft	Ministry of Health, New South Wales
Ms	Kirstan	Corben	Victorian Health Promotion Foundation
Dr	David	Cusack	Food Authority, New South Wales
Ms	Katinka	Day	Choice
Ms	Katy	Day	Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, Victoria
Dr	Zena	Dinesen	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
Mr	Jim	Dodds	Environmental Health, Western Australia
Ms	Sophie	Dwyer	Department of Health, Queensland
Ms	Elizabeth	Flynn	Australian Government, Department of Health
Ms	Tenille	Fort	Department of Health, Queensland
Prof	Sharon	Friel	Australian National University
Ms	Liz	Good	Department of Health, Queensland
Ms	Maria	Gracie	Ministry for Primary Industries, New Zealand
Ms	Veronica	Graham	Department of Health and Human Services, Victoria
Dr	Siobhan	Harpur	Department of Health, Tasmania
Ms	Jenny	Hazelton	Food Standards Australia New Zealand
Ms	Aloysa	Hourigan	Nutrition Australia
Ms	Clare	Hughes	Cancer Council, New South Wales
Dr	Fay	Jenkins	Department of Health, South Australia
Ms	Holly	Jones	Australian Government Department of Health
Ms	Alexandra	Jones	The George Institute for Global Health
Ms	Sharon	Laurence	Department of Health & Human Services, Victoria
Prof	Mark	Lawrence	Deakin University
Prof	Amanda	Lee	The Sax Institute
Ms	Janine	Lewis	Food Standards Australia New Zealand
Ms	Emma	Lonsdale	Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance
Dr	Dorothy	Mackerras	Food Standards Australia New Zealand
Ms	Jane	Martin	Cancer Council, Victoria
Ms	Nadia	Mastersson	Department of Health and Ageing, South Australian
Ms	Catrina	McStay	Environmental Health, Western Australia

Ms	Julie-Anne	McWhinnie	Department of Health, South Australia
Mr	Roger	Meany	Department of Health, Queensland
Dr	Jo	Mitchell	Ministry of Health, New South Wales
Ms	Liz	Munn	Ministry of Health, New South Wales
Ms	Kelly	Neville	Department of Health and Human Services, Victoria
Prof	Cliona	Ni Mhurchu	The George Institute for Global Health, Australia and The University of Auckland, New Zealand
Ms	Erica	Nixon	Department of Health, Australian Capital Territory
Prof	Anna	Peeters	Deakin University
Mr	Alan	Philp	Australian Government Department of Health
Dr	Christina	Pollard	East Metropolitan Health Service, Western Australia
Mr	John	Prichard	Australian Local Government Association
Ms	Monique	Reardon	Department of Health, Tasmania
Dr	Belinda	Reeve	The University of Sydney Law School
Ms	Jenny	Reid	Ministry for Primary Industries, New Zealand
Dr	Malcolm	Riley	CSIRO
Dr	Gary	Sacks	Deakin University
Ms	Judy	Seal	Department of Health, Tasmania
Ms	Rebecca	Stones	Health Protection Service, Australian Capital Territory
Dr	Lisa	Studdert	Australian Government Department of Health
Ms	Denise	Sullivan	Department of Health, Western Australia
Dr	Helen	Trevena	Sydney University
Ms	Carrie	Turner	Department of Health, Northern Territory
Dr	Lennert	Veerman	Griffith University
Dr	Helen	Vidgen	Queensland University of Technology
Ms	Wendy	Watson	Cancer Council, New South Wales
Dr	Trevor	Webb	Food Standards Australia New Zealand
Ms	Deanne	Wooden	Heart Foundation
Dr	Julie	Woods	Deakin University