



Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments

**2019 progress update
Victorian Government**

March 2019

Further details available at
www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

**VIC
2019**

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 Victorian Government (July 2016 – December 2018) in relation to the recommended policies identified in the 2017 report.

Key areas in which the Victorian Government has made progress



Introducing mandatory kilojoule menu labelling (May 2018), requiring certain chain food outlets and supermarkets to display kilojoules on their menus and food tags



Accelerating uptake of the Victorian Government's Healthy Choices guidelines within sport and recreation facilities, supported through the Healthy Eating Advisory Service and the Achievement Program



Incorporating the Healthy Choices guidelines within the 'Boost Your Business Food Innovation Voucher Stream' to incentivise the development of healthier food products



Recommended action areas for the Victorian Government

The 2017 Food Policy Index report prioritised 19 recommendations for action. Recommended focus areas for the next 12-18 months are:



Food provision: Developing healthy food procurement policies for the Department of Health and Human Services which would require staff across Victoria to make healthier choices when purchasing catering using government funds



Food provision: Further improving the supply and promotion of healthy food and drinks within public settings, by increasing the scale and uptake of the Healthy Choices guidelines and aligned policies within early childhood settings, schools, health care services, sport and recreation facilities, parks and universities



Food promotion: Implement policies to restrict all unhealthy food and beverage advertising in settings controlled or managed by the Victorian Government

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 19 recommended policy actions for the Victorian 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 Victorian 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 Victorian Government in relation to the recommended policies from the 2017 Food Policy Index report

	Domain	Recommended policy action	Progress in relation to recommended action	Assessment
VIC1	Support for communities	Put in place overarching state-wide structures and resources to support the creation and maintenance of healthy food environments at the community level across multiple settings	The Victorian Government has a suite of Healthy Choices policy guidelines for sport and recreation facilities, hospitals, health services, universities, workplaces and parks, as well as aligned policies for schools and early childcare settings that provide consistent healthy food supply standards across multiple settings. To support implementation across the state, the Victorian Government funds the Healthy Eating Advisory Service (HEAS) to coordinate support across these settings to improve the supply and promotion of healthy foods and drinks, and to reduce the supply of unhealthy options. In 2018, HEAS released <i>FoodChecker</i> , an online menu assessment tool, to assist retailers in aligning with the Healthy Choices guidelines. The Victorian Healthy Eating Enterprise is a state-wide platform providing resources, networking, coordination and collaboration opportunities to communities and organisations implementing healthy eating initiatives, engaging more than 300 partners from across the health sector and state at four roundtable events each year.	Some action
VIC2	Food provision	Establish a whole-of-government policy on healthy food procurement and provision across all Victorian government departments and settings under government control	There is work underway to develop a Department of Human Services Healthy Food Procurement policy which would require staff across Victoria to make healthier choices when purchasing catering using government funds.	Some action
VIC3	Monitoring and intelligence	Implement ongoing monitoring of food environments, including the marketing of unhealthy foods to children, and the nutritional quality of food available in schools and public sector settings	There is no systematic and comprehensive monitoring of food environments. The HEAS collects data on its level of engagement with all settings and the organisations that are working towards or have met Healthy Choices, and other healthy eating policies and guidelines.	Some action
VIC4	Food provision	Improve compliance with the 'School Canteens and Other School Food Services Policy' in all schools by extending reporting mechanisms, incentives and support systems	The Victorian Government funds HEAS to provide free support to schools in implementing the Department of Education and Training (DET) <i>School Canteens and Other School Food Services policy</i> . Early childhood services also receive free support from HEAS to meet the National Quality Standards on healthy eating through HEAS. There are no new incentive programs in place.	Some action
VIC5	Food promotion	Require all organisations that receive funding from the Victorian Government to restrict all promotion (including sponsorship) related to unhealthy food and beverages as a condition of receiving funding	Implementation of the Healthy Choices guidelines is a condition of receiving Better Indoor Stadiums and Community Sport Infrastructure (Better Pools category) Funds, which provides up to \$3 million to local council stadium and pool infrastructure projects, through Sports and Recreation Victoria. VicHealth has been working with sporting organisations to help inform next steps to reduce junk food sponsorship in sports.	Some action
VIC6	Food retail	Develop guidelines and support local governments to improve the availability of healthy foods and decrease the availability and promotion of unhealthy foods in retail settings	HEAS and the Healthy Choices policy guidelines provide support to local government to improve the availability and promotion of healthy food and drinks in key retail settings. In 2018, 92% of Victorian local governments have prioritised healthier eating in their Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plans. VicHealth's Water in Sport Initiative 2017-20 supports 8 local governments to make water the drink of choice in canteens/retail food outlets in sport and active recreation facilities.	Some action
VIC7	Food promotion	Implement policies to restrict the promotion of unhealthy food and beverages in settings controlled or managed by the Victorian Government	Implementation of the (voluntary) Healthy Choices guidelines within sport and recreation centres includes food promotion targets, and states that organisations should not engage in sponsorship, marketing, branding or advertising to children and youth of foods and drinks inconsistent with Healthy Choices. Victoria has contributed to the development of a national interim guide for reducing children's exposure to unhealthy food and drink marketing, for voluntary use by governments.	Some action
VIC8	Governance	Implement formal health impact assessments on population nutrition and health as part of the policy development and proposal process	The <i>Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015-2019</i> and associated outcomes framework and action plan guides population nutrition activities across government. There are no requirements to include formal health impact assessments on population nutrition and health as part of the policy development process.	Limited action
VIC9	Food retail	Amend the planning framework to explicitly make health and healthy food environments a priority in state planning, to facilitate local governments in limiting the placement / density of unhealthy food outlets while supporting healthy food outlets	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action

VIC10	Food provision	Demonstrate long-term commitment and support for the 'Achievement Program' and the 'Healthy Eating Advisory Service', supporting public / private-sector settings to implement healthy food policies	The Victorian Government is committed to increasing access to healthy foods in multiple settings through the Healthy Choices and other healthy eating policies and guidelines, the HEAS and the Achievement Program (AP). The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has revised the AP, but continues a focus on healthy eating and support for settings to implement healthy food policies. Alfred Health collaborates with HEAS and AP to support the uptake of the Healthy Choices policy in hospitals and health services.	Substantive action
VIC11	Support for communities	Integrate practical skills in growing and cooking foods, and nutrition information, into the school curriculum across all school years in a way that supports existing teaching priorities	The Victorian Government funded the Playground to Plate Grants Scheme, administered by the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation. The scheme provided 100 government primary schools with a one-off \$5,000 infrastructure grant to establish or enhance a kitchen garden program. The Stephanie Alexander program has also been funded to expand its program through the Pleasurable Food Education Package, which reaches 250 early childhood services, primary and secondary schools.	Some action
VIC12	Food retail	Implement programs to incentivise sports and recreation clubs to sell healthier foods and beverages whilst limiting unhealthy foods and beverages	Through collaboration between Victorian Government stakeholders, implementation of the Healthy Choices guidelines, specific for sport and recreation facilities, has improved the healthiness of foods and drinks supplied within these settings. This has been incentivised through the embedding of the guidelines within Victorian Government facility funding grants, the support of lead adopters such as the YMCA Victoria, as well as research collaborations that demonstrate the business case for change. Consistent implementation support for food supply change has been provided through the HEAS. VicHealth has provided additional support to Regional Sports Assemblies, State Sporting Associations, local governments, sports clubs, associations and sport and recreation facilities to trial retail nudges that promote healthy choices within sports venues.	Some action
VIC13	Support for communities	Commit to ongoing, long-term support for social marketing campaigns promoting healthy eating, as part of broader efforts to improve population nutrition	In May 2018, the Victorian Government launched a small consumer education campaign and associated web resources to raise awareness and support the introduction of kilojoule menu labelling laws in chain food outlets. Phase 2 is being planned for 2018-19. VicHealth has invested in a social marketing campaign to promote healthier eating through reduced salt intake, with investment continuing in 2018 and 2019.	Some action
VIC14	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	Deakin University has partnered with the DET, DHHS, VicHealth, primary care partnerships and health services in Northern Victoria to trial a whole-of-community approach to childhood obesity prevention. As part of this study, school level direct height and weight measurements will be taken.	Some action
VIC15	Food labelling	Extend the proposed implementation of kilojoule menu labelling in fast food chains to apply to more settings (e.g., cinemas) with potential adaptation of the HSR scheme for menu labelling	<i>The Food Amendment (Kilojoule Labelling Scheme and Other Matters) Act 2017</i> came into effect in Victoria on 1 May 2018 requiring certain large chain food outlets and supermarkets to display kilojoules on their menus, and food tags as well as display 'the average daily adult energy intake is 8,700 kJ'. Future policy responses will be considered once the evaluation of the kilojoule labelling scheme in Victoria has taken place.	Some action
VIC16	Food retail	Implement programs, e.g., incentives or accreditation schemes, for restaurants, pubs and clubs to improve the healthiness of menu options, building on the 'Healthy Dining Victoria - Pubs and Clubs' initiative	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
VIC17	Governance	Establish governance structures to improve policy coherence regarding agriculture, food, health, and innovation / research and development policies	Collaboration between DHHS and Agriculture Victoria, has led the Healthy Choices guidelines to be incorporated into the 'Boost Your Business Food Innovation Voucher Stream'. Businesses were encouraged to consider the guidelines in their applications.	Some action
VIC18	Governance	Modify the government lobby register to require more detailed reporting, including details of specific lobbying activities	The Victorian Register of lobbyists is a public online platform that contains information about lobbyists who make representation to government on behalf of their clients. The Victorian Public Sector Commissioner maintains the register. No changes in reporting requirements have recently been made.	Limited action
VIC19	Governance	Improve transparency of political donations by introducing online, real-time declaration of political donations over \$1,000	The Electoral Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 overhauled Victoria's political donations regime by eliminating large donations (donations capped at \$4000 over 4 years) and ushered in Australia's most transparent donation disclosure laws. All donations over \$1000 need to be disclosed in real-time.	Substantive action

Acknowledgements

This project was conducted by researchers within the Global Obesity Centre, a World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention within the Institute for Health Transformation at Deakin University, in conjunction with the Obesity Policy Coalition.

Funding for this project has been provided from the Australian Government's Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF). The MRFF provides funding to support health and medical research and innovation, with the objective of improving the health and wellbeing of Australians. MRFF funding has been provided to The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre under the Boosting Preventative Health Research Program. Further information on the MRFF is available at www.health.gov.au/mrff. Gary Sacks is the recipient of an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DE160100307) and a Heart Foundation Future Leader Fellowship from the National Heart Foundation of Australia.

The project forms part of INFORMAS (International Network for Food and Obesity/NCD's Research, Monitoring, Action and Support), a global network of public interest organisations and researchers that seek to monitor and benchmark public and private sector actions to create healthier food environments and reduce obesity and NCD's globally.

We would like to thank all of the Victorian Government officials that contributed their time and expertise to this report.

The contents of this published material are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not reflect the views of the funding partners.

Cite this report as: Sacks G, Robinson E for the Food-EPI Australia project team. Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments: 2019 Progress update, Victorian Government. Melbourne: Deakin University, 2019.

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

