



Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments

**Scorecard and priority
recommendations for the
Australian Federal
government**

February 2017

Further details available at
www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

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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 5

Things the Australian Federal government is doing well
(with reference to international best practice)



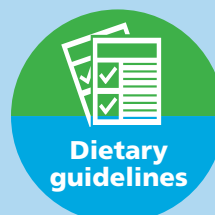
Regular monitoring of population body weight at a national level



No GST on fresh fruit and vegetables



Development of the Health Star Rating scheme, and regulations on health and nutrition claims



Food-based dietary guidelines implemented, based on rigorous evidence



Procedures for transparency and broad consultation as part of policy development within the Food Regulation System

Top 7



policy recommendations for the Australian Federal government

Establish obesity prevention as a national priority, with a national taskforce, sustained funding, and regular monitoring

1

Develop a National Nutrition Policy, building on the work that has already been undertaken to inform its development

2

Implement a health levy on sugar-sweetened drinks, and invest revenue raised into public health interventions

3

Implement mandatory time-based (up to 9:00pm) restrictions of unhealthy food advertising on broadcast media

4

Fast-track changes to the Health Star Rating scheme to address anomalies/design issues, and make the scheme mandatory for all packaged food by July 2019

5

Commit sustained funding and ongoing support for a comprehensive diet and nutrition survey conducted every 5-10 years

6

Establish targets for national population dietary intake and for reductions in key nutrients in major food categories

7

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.

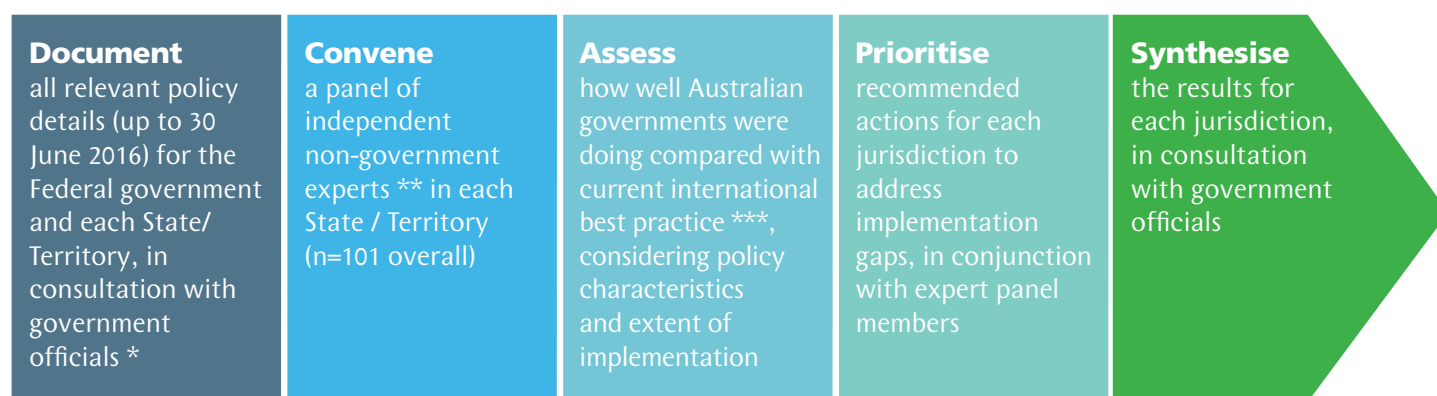
This project aimed to assess the extent to which governments in Australia are implementing globally recommended policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments, and identify prioritised actions for each government.

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

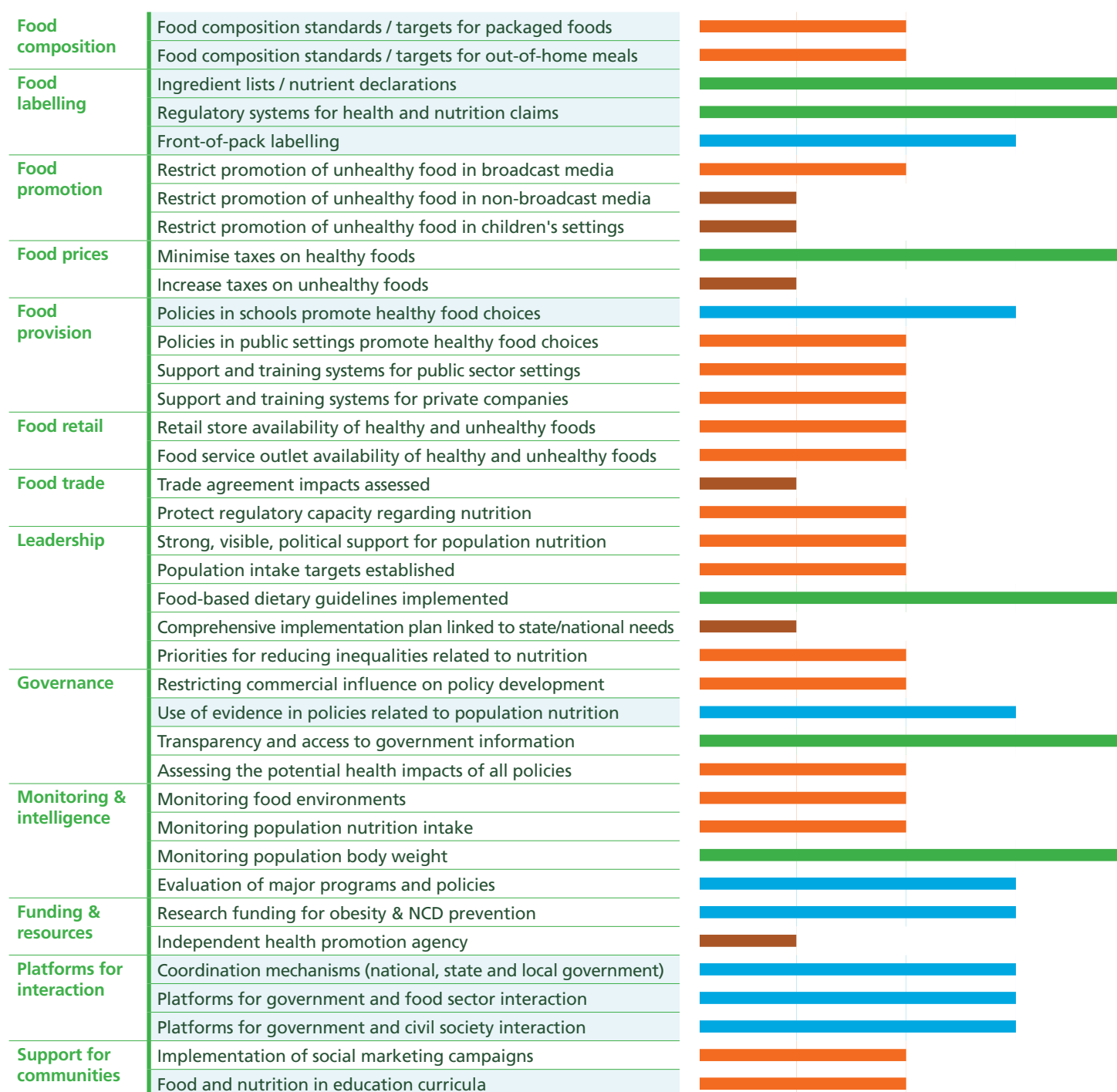
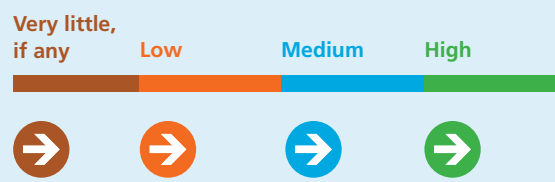
** Panel members included academics, nutritionists, and senior representatives from health NGOs and community groups with expertise in population nutrition and / or obesity prevention

*** 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 Australian Federal government



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

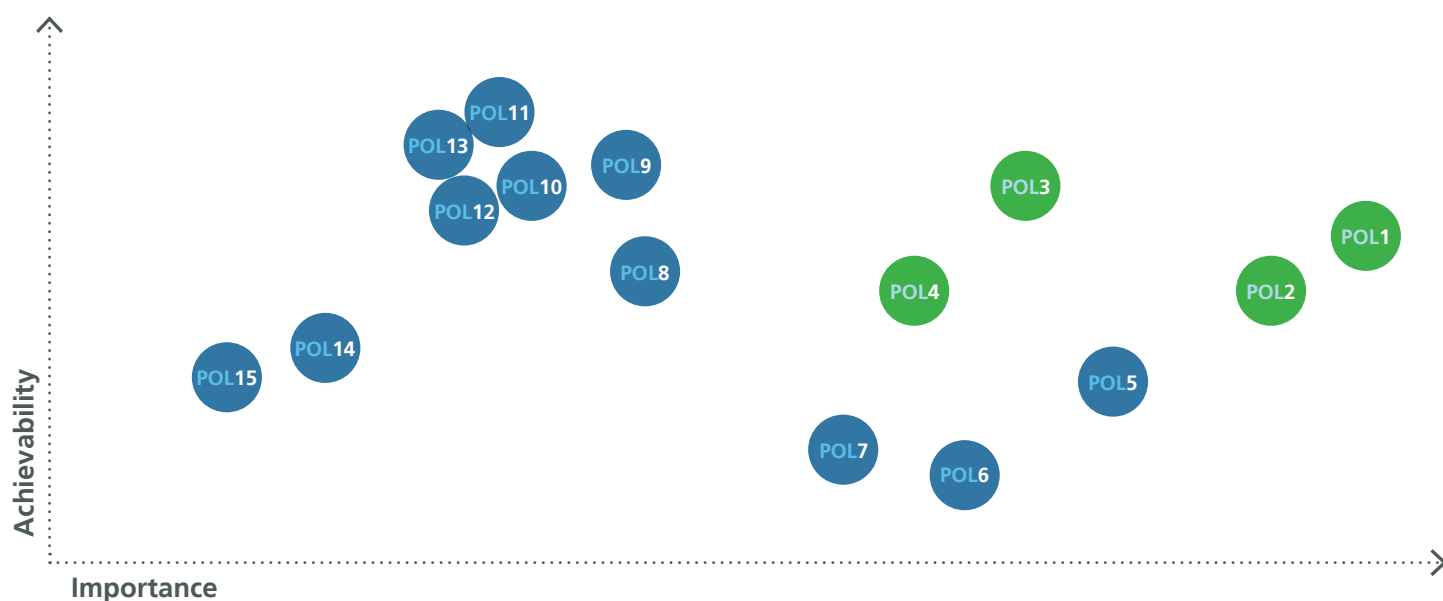


Indicates areas in which the Federal government collaborates with State and Territory governments to set national guidance and policy

Prioritised recommended actions for the Australian Federal government

Policy actions targeting food environments

	Domain	Recommended policy action
POL1	Food prices	Implement a health levy on sugar-sweetened drinks to increase consumer-end prices by 20%, and invest revenue raised into public health interventions
POL2	Food promotion	Implement mandatory time-based (up to 9:00pm) restrictions of unhealthy food and beverage advertising on broadcast media (television and radio), including effective monitoring and enforcement
POL3	Food composition	Establish clear national targets for reductions in salt, saturated fat, trans fat and added sugar in key food categories related to packaged foods and out-of-home meals
POL4	Food labelling	Fast-track changes to the Health Star Rating scheme to address anomalies / design issues, and make the scheme mandatory for all packaged food by July 2019 in collaboration with State and Territory governments
POL5	Food promotion	Staged removal of unhealthy food and beverage sponsorship of major sporting codes and events
POL6	Food prices	Implement a health levy on unhealthy foods (broadly defined, including sugar-sweetened drinks, confectionery, unhealthy snack food, unhealthy take-away food, etc.) to increase consumer-end prices by 20%, and invest revenue raised into public health interventions
POL7	Food promotion	Remove the tax deductibility (for companies) of marketing expenditure related to the promotion of unhealthy food and beverages
POL8	Food labelling	Restrict the use of nutrition content claims on discretionary foods (as defined by the Australian Dietary Guidelines and associated resources) in collaboration with State and Territory governments
POL9	Food labelling	Provide resources to support improved consumer awareness and understanding of the Health Star Rating scheme, particularly targeting vulnerable populations
POL10	Food provision	Develop and implement clear, consistent policies to provide and promote healthy food choices in food service activities (canteens, food at events, fundraising, promotions, vending machines, public procurement standards etc.) in settings under Federal government control. This includes public sector workplaces, and government-owned, funded or managed services
POL11	Food provision	Update and strengthen the National Healthy School Canteen guidelines (including restrictions on the promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages in all primary and secondary schools), and provide additional resources to support the States and Territories to implement the guidelines
POL12	Food composition	Continue and re-emphasise the government's commitment to the newly established Healthy Food Partnership, including resources to support implementation as well as independent monitoring and evaluation of progress and performance
POL13	Food provision	Revise the regulations for early childhood settings to include detailed requirements regarding the healthiness of foods provided and promoted, and provide resources to support implementation
POL14	Food retail	Through the Healthy Food Partnership, explore voluntary initiatives to increase the in-store availability of healthy foods (e.g., healthy kids menus in fast food outlets) and decrease the in-store availability of unhealthy foods (e.g., confectionery- and soft-drink free checkout lanes in supermarkets)
POL15	Food provision	Provide funding and support to the States and Territories to support private sector companies to develop, implement and monitor health and wellbeing policies, adopting a national approach and building on the resources currently available

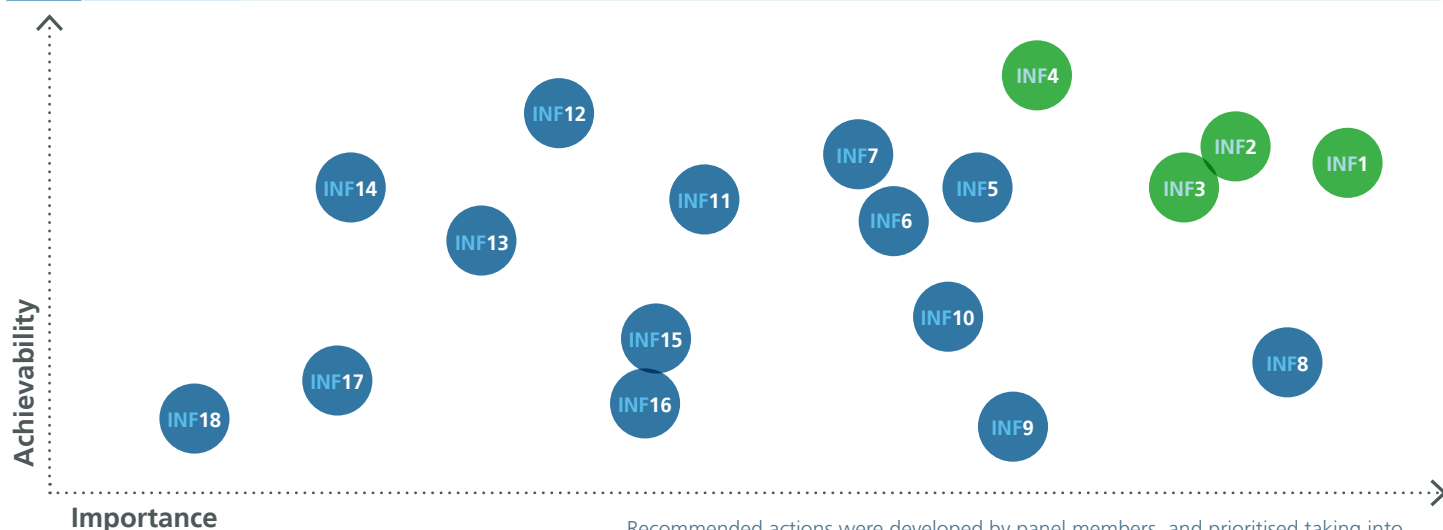


Recommended actions were developed by panel members, and prioritised taking into account their perceptions of the relative importance (including perceived need, likely impact and equity) and achievability (including feasibility, level of acceptability to a wide range of key stakeholders, affordability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

Prioritised recommended actions for the Australian Federal government

Infrastructure support actions

	Domain	Recommended policy action
INF1	Leadership	Establish obesity prevention as a national priority, with a national taskforce, sustained funding, regular and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of key measures, and regular reporting with respect to targets
INF2	Leadership	Develop a National Nutrition Policy, building on the work that has already been undertaken to inform its development. The Policy should: be integrated with the National Strategic Framework for Chronic Conditions and National Diabetes Strategy; include explicit, specific strategies to reduce inequalities and target all vulnerable populations, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; and be supported by a long-term funding stream, with co-ordination across government departments and jurisdictions
INF3	Monitoring & intelligence	Commit sustained funding and ongoing support for a comprehensive diet and nutrition survey conducted every 5-10 years
INF4	Leadership	Establish national population dietary intake targets, including reducing the proportion of discretionary food intake
INF5	Funding and resources	Ensure research funding allocation, including the Medical Research Future Fund, takes into account the diseases and conditions with the highest burden, including an increase in the proportion of research funding that is allocated specifically to improving population nutrition and diet-related non-communicable disease prevention
INF6	Support for communities	Develop and fund an ongoing comprehensive obesity prevention or nutrition-focused social marketing campaign, implemented across a wide range of platforms and channels, designed to support related policy initiatives
INF7	Support for communities	Support nutrition education in schools and early childhood education and care services by: integrating practical nutrition and cooking skills into the national curriculum for all school years; embedding nutrition and the Australian Dietary Guidelines into learning outcomes assessment requirements; adequately educating, training, accrediting and otherwise supporting teachers to be able to provide high quality nutrition information to students
INF8	Funding and resources	Re-establish the Australian National Preventive Health Agency (or a similar independent agency), with a secure funding stream, to coordinate health promotion functions (including improving population nutrition) across jurisdictions
INF9	Governance	Implement a health-in-all-policies framework nationally, with 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
INF10	Governance	Set clear guidelines for involvement of different stakeholders in policy development processes, ensuring that food industry representatives are not involved in setting policy objectives and agendas where they have conflicts of interest with improving population nutrition
INF11	Support for communities	Support community-based interventions to create healthy food environments by implementing and funding a national knowledge translation and exchange platform to provide advice, promote best practice, and offer networking opportunities
INF12	Support for communities	Provide additional resources to support increased understanding, use and uptake of the Australian Dietary Guidelines among the general public
INF13	Leadership	Explicitly incorporate environmental sustainability in the next revision of the Australian Dietary Guidelines
INF14	Governance	Introduce requirements for stakeholders to declare potential conflicts of interest during public consultation processes regarding policy development and implementation
INF15	Monitoring & intelligence	Establish a consistent national approach to regular measuring of children's height and weight at key stages of primary and secondary schools, including 'opt-out' consent
INF16	Governance	Implement measures (such as cross-departmental working groups and advisory boards) to improve integration, dialogue and policy coherence across agriculture, health and trade, with the aim of ensuring that public health and nutrition are explicit and specific considerations during policy development processes
INF17	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)
INF18	Governance	Improve transparency of political donations by introducing online, real-time declaration of political donations over \$1,000, and apply these requirements nationally



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)
Food composition	Food composition standards / targets for packaged foods	Argentina Mandatory maximum levels of sodium (salt) permitted in various food categories Denmark Ban on trans fats
	Food composition targets / standards for out-of-home meals	USA National Salt Reduction Initiative has established salt reduction targets for 25 restaurant food categories
Food labelling	Ingredient lists / nutrient declarations	Canada, USA (and others) Requirement for trans fat labelling on packaged food USA Requirement for added sugar to be included on labelling of packaged food
	Regulatory systems for health and nutrition claims	Australia Regulations on health and nutrition claims
	Front-of-pack labelling	Chile Warning labels for products high in energy, sugar, saturated fat or sodium Ecuador Mandatory traffic light labelling indicating healthiness of food products
Food promotion	Restrict promotion of unhealthy food in broadcast media	Chile No advertising of unhealthy foods directed to children under 14 (or when audience share is greater than 20% children)
	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
	Restrict promotion of unhealthy food in children's settings	Spain Legislation requires that kindergartens and schools are free from all advertising
Food prices	Minimise taxes on healthy foods	Australia No GST on basic foods (including fresh fruit and vegetables)
	Increase taxes on unhealthy foods	Mexico 10% tax on sugary-drinks and 8% tax on unhealthy snack foods Hungary Public health tax on sugary-drinks and various unhealthy foods
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
	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)
	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
	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
Food retail	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
	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
Food trade	Trade agreement impacts assessed	European Union Mandatory environmental impact assessments (potentially including health impacts) for all new trade agreements
	Protect regulatory capacity regarding nutrition	Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) clauses in World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements

Benchmarks of good practice Infrastructure support actions

Domain	Policy area	International best practise (as identified by INFORMAS)
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
	Population intake targets established	Brazil 'Strategic Action Plan for Confronting NCDs' specifies targets for fruit and vegetable consumption, and reductions in average salt intake
	Food-based dietary guidelines implemented	Brazil National dietary guidelines address healthy eating from a cultural, ethical and environmental perspective
	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
	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
Governance	Restricting commercial influence on policy development	USA Mandatory and publicly accessible lobby registers – including extensive reporting of nature of lobbying activities
	Use of evidence in policies related to population nutrition	Australia NHMRC requirements to develop evidence-based guidelines
	Transparency and access to government information	Australia Open access principles across governments, FSANZ processes for extensive stakeholder engagement in the development of new standards
	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
Monitoring & intelligence	Monitoring food environments	New Zealand Comprehensive database of nutrient information for different foods, continued monitoring of school food environments nationwide
	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
	Monitoring population body weight	UK National Child Measurement Program for children's BMI, assessing children ages 4-6 and 10-11
	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
Funding & 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
	Independent health promotion agency	Thailand The Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) is an autonomous government agency established as a dedicated health promotion agency
Platforms for interaction	Coordination mechanisms (national, state and local government)	Australia Food Regulatory system provides several forums and committees that bring together Health Ministers from Australian States and Territories, the Federal Government, as well as other Ministers from related portfolios (e.g. Primary Industries) and local government where relevant
	Platforms for government and food sector interaction	UK Responsibility Deal was a UK government initiative to bring together food companies and NGOs to take steps (through voluntary pledges) to address NCDs
	Platforms for government and civil society interaction	Brazil The National Council of Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA) is a body made up of civil society and government representatives that advises the President's office on matters involving food and nutrition security
Support for communities	Implementation of social marketing campaigns	Multiple international examples
	Food and nutrition in education curricula	UK National framework for core food competency skills and knowledge in children ages 5-16 years

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