

Media release

Health and consumer alliance sends unified message to govt: clear food labelling a key to healthier Australia

Australians are only likely to make informed, healthy choices about buying packaged foods if a clear and simple, interpretive front-of-pack labelling system is introduced.

That's the message from a powerful alliance of leading health and consumer groups which met this week, as government consultations continue in the lead-up to an expected announcement on a new labelling system later this year from federal, state and territory governments.

Professor Greg Johnson, Chair of the Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance, which represents the five leading chronic disease NGOs, said unhealthy diet was a major factor in the rapid increase in obesity, type 2 diabetes and other chronic diseases.

“Despite this growing health crisis, consumers who want to make healthier choices have no clear guidance on what packaged foods to purchase,” Professor Johnson said. “We urgently need a new, interpretive front-of-pack food labelling system that translates complex nutrition information into an easy guide for consumers.”

Michael Moore, CEO of the Public Health Association of Australia, said the current daily intake guide, with its percentages of positive and negative nutrients, had been shown in independent studies to be confusing for consumers.

“Consumers are telling us they want to make healthier food choices, yet they are stuck with a system that even scientists can't use,” Mr Moore said. “Millions of Australians buy packaged foods every day and they are entitled to a simple interpretive system using colours and symbols that is easy to understand.”

Mr Moore said Australia is facing an epidemic of diet and obesity related disease.

“If governments are serious about improving the nation's health and empowering consumers to make healthy choices, then they have to support a new approach to front-of-pack labelling on all packaged food,” he said.

Professor Johnson said many health and consumer groups had advocated for a traffic light-style system as research showed people could easily understand it.

“The federal government has already ruled out traffic lights, but we will continue to call for a system that retains its core principles – an interpretive system that includes colours and symbols that are easy to understand, provides a quick comparison between different products, and makes healthy choices easy.”

For media comment:

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The health and consumer groups:

Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance - www.cancer.org.au/acdpa

Australian Medical Association – www.ama.com.au

Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) - www.awash.org.au

Cancer Council Australia - www.cancer.org.au

Cancer Council NSW - www.cancercouncil.com.au

CHOICE - www.choice.com.au

Diabetes Australia - www.diabetesaustralia.com.au

Diabetes Australia Vic - www.diabetesvic.org.au

National Heart Foundation - www.heartfoundation.org.au

Kidney Health Australia - www.kidney.org.au

National Stroke Foundation - www.strokefoundation.com.au

The George Institute - www.georgeinstitute.org.au

Physical Activity, Nutrition and Obesity Research Group (PANORG) -

www.sydney.edu.au/medicine/public-health/panorg

Obesity Policy Coalition - www.opc.org.au

Public Health Association Australia – www.phaa.net.au ,

University of Wollongong - www.uow.edu.au