

Media release – 6 September 2012

Draft National Food Plan seriously undercooked: ‘recipe for ongoing obesity’ say health groups

The Government’s draft National Food Plan puts business before health while millions of Australians risk eating themselves to an earlier death than past generations, according to leading public health organisations meeting in Canberra today [6 Sept.].

Meeting at federal Parliament House, experts from the National Heart Foundation, Cancer Council Australia, the Public Health Association of Australia and other health groups said the final National Food Plan should differ markedly from the draft and include:

- Stronger recognition of the massive cost to the economy of diet-related disease in Australia and clear measures to reduce these costs;
- Better support for Australian farmers so that fresh produce is more readily available to all Australians, including those in remote communities;
- A comprehensive approach to reducing obesity in Australia, particularly among children, which could include economic measures such as taxes and subsidies;
- A commitment to accelerating the national food reformulation program.

Cancer Council Australia CEO, Professor Ian Olver, said Australia’s unprecedented obesity rates were noted throughout the draft, yet there were no robust recommendations for addressing a problem that could cause life expectancy for millions of Australians to drop compared with their parents.

“The draft plan puts up numerous innovative recommendations for making the food business more profitable, but the section on nutrition only offers soft options such as ‘developing guidelines’ and ‘monitoring initiatives’,” Professor Olver said.

“Business and health should coexist as shared priorities in a genuine national food plan, but the draft suggests the Government is more interested in the commercial side of food. This won’t provide a net benefit to Australia if the community costs of obesity keep rising.”

The Heart Foundation’s Director of Cardiovascular Health, Dr Rob Grenfell, agreed. “We need to supercharge key initiatives, such as the food reformulation program, which have the potential to have an enormous population impact at little cost,” Dr Grenfell said.

Public Health Association nutritionist, Dr Rosemary Stanton, said the National Food Plan should focus on the fundamental purpose of food – sustaining healthy life.

“If we don’t get the food plan right, we’re consigning our children to a dramatically increased risk of diabetes, heart attacks, strokes, cancer and other diet-related illnesses,” Dr Stanton said. “No government should want this to occur on their watch.”

Obesity costs Australia around \$58 billion each year.

Media contacts:

Cancer Council, Paul Grogan 0409-456-727; Heart Foundation, Kirsten Andrews 0413-777-404