



RACP
Specialists. Together

EDUCATE ADVOCATE INNOVATE

From the President

6 August 2021

The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet
P O Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via Email: Minister.Hunt@health.gov.au

Dear Minister

Call for the release of the National Obesity Strategy

On behalf of The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP), the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine (AFPHM) and the Paediatrics and Child Health Division (PCHD), we write to request the immediate release of the National Obesity Strategy (Strategy).

The development of the Strategy was announced in 2018, with extensive consultations in late 2019 and early 2020 involving over 2,000 participants. The release of the Strategy has been repeatedly delayed and the latest update indicates that the draft Strategy is not expected to be presented to Health Ministers until 2022.

These repeated delays are concerning given the combined disease burden of poor diet and unhealthy weight in Australia is now greater than tobacco smoking. Obesity in Australia is an urgent public health issue, with two thirds of adults, almost half of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 and one in four children above a healthy weight. More than nine out of ten Australian adults and children do not eat a healthy diet.¹ The World Health Organisation and the World Obesity Federation have highlighted non-communicable diseases, including obesity, as a risk factor for becoming seriously ill with COVID-19. Existing data suggests that obesity is a key risk factor for COVID-19 complications.²

Obesity has direct and indirect costs to children, adults, families, governments, private health insurers, employers and society more broadly. Obesity impacts not only physical health but the mental health and wellbeing of those living with obesity and those caring for them. The direct costs of obesity to Australia in 2011-2012 were determined to be \$3.8 billion, while indirect costs were calculated to be \$4.8 billion.³

¹ Overweight and obesity, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, July 2021

² Obesity and COVID-19, World Obesity Federation, 2020

³ Weighing the cost of obesity: A case for action. PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2015

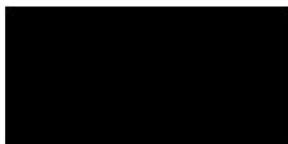
A comprehensive and integrated national plan that outlines actions that need to be taken to prevent obesity and improve diets is now more urgent than ever. The RACP recognises the multifactorial causes of obesity, the health burden created by it and the need for physicians and paediatricians to advocate for societal and systemic changes which will reduce the prevalence and impact of obesity. A phased but connected National Obesity Strategy will help thousands of physicians and paediatricians to advocate for and support patients living with obesity and related health conditions.

We ask that the Strategy, focused on prevention and broad-based promotion of health across food and physical environments and social determinants of health, is released as a matter of priority. Further work, such as on treatment of obesity, is important but should not delay the release of the completed work on prevention. We recommend a phased approach, with the first part on primary and secondary prevention released now and the second, on treatment and management, released at a later stage following additional national consultations. We look forward to the release of the Strategy for an urgent final review as the first step towards renewed engagement in this key policy area and offer our support and expertise to the national efforts to tackle obesity set out in the Strategy and beyond.

The Strategy is a fundamental tool and roadmap for all governments to drive meaningful change. It is now more important than ever to support and build a healthy and resilient population to enable a strong economy.

If you would like to discuss this in more detail, please contact Senior Policy Officer, Dr Dorota Sacha-Krol on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



Professor John Wilson AM
RACP President



Professor Robyn Lucas FAFPHM
AFPHM President



Professor Catherine Choong FRACP
PCHD President