

31 July 2009



Ms Karen Ellingford
Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
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Dear Ms Ellingford,

Submission to parliamentary inquiry into the potential for developing opportunities for schools to become a focus on promoting healthy community living

The Obesity Policy Coalition (OPC) is a coalition between Cancer Council Victoria, Diabetes Australia – Victoria, VicHealth and the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention at Deakin University. We are concerned about the escalating rates of overweight and obesity in Australia, particularly in children.

We thank you for this opportunity to comment on the parliamentary inquiry into the potential for developing opportunities for schools to become a focus for promoting healthy community living. We welcome the broad terms of reference for this inquiry, including the review of existing health promotion programs and activities in schools, consideration of whether it is appropriate for the State to extend health promotion programs to the broader school community, exploration of opportunities for networking and partnerships and consideration of how school based activities can be most effective, in conjunction with broader health promotion policies and activities.

The purpose of our submission is to highlight our support for the work of Kids – ‘Go for your life’ (KGFYL) and its submission to this inquiry. The KGFYL program, funded by the Victorian government and managed by Diabetes Australia – Victoria and Cancer Council Victoria, has engaged schools and the wider community in a range of comprehensive, evidence based, health promoting programs and activities to improve healthy eating and the physical activity levels of children. These programs and activities, together with some recommendations for improving the coordination of government funding and programs, and providing further government resources to work towards increasing KGFYL’s membership, are outlined in KGFYL’s submission. We strongly support these recommendations. We also encourage the government to establish sound procedures for monitoring and evaluating any policies, programs and activities to ensure compliance and measure their effectiveness. Furthermore, we believe that a state-wide policy on food, nutrition and health would greatly assist with the agenda for schools as a focus for promoting healthy community living.

We agree with KGFYL that moving forward, a comprehensive, consistent and evidence based approach to health promotion in schools and the wider community is vital to the health of Victorian children. Schools provide a

A partnership with:

The Cancer Council Victoria
Diabetes Australia-Victoria
WHO Collaborating Centre
for Obesity Prevention,
Deakin University

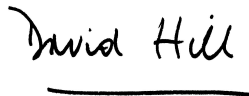
with support from
VicHealth

unique setting for reaching children from a wide range of backgrounds, teaching children about healthy living, engaging children in activities to improve their health and engaging the broader community in health promoting programs and activities.

It is important to recognise however, that school settings and school programs and policies are but one element of the comprehensive approach that will be required by all Australian governments and others in Victoria (such as wider community organisations, the medical sector, the food industry and individuals) to curb the growing problem of childhood overweight and obesity. As you may know, the OPC advocates very strongly for comprehensive, evidenced based policy and regulatory initiatives to reduce childhood overweight and obesity in Victoria and nationally. It is now widely accepted by experts and health organisations that policy and regulatory reforms to restrict unhealthy food advertising and marketing, improve food labelling, make healthier choices more accessible and affordable and improving the physical environment will be essential if the escalating rate of childhood overweight and obesity is to be curbed in any meaningful way. We strongly encourage the Victorian government to continue exploring these potential areas for reform and take the decisive and comprehensive action that is urgently required.

Please do not hesitate to contact Jane Martin, Senior Policy Adviser to the Obesity Policy Coalition on (03) 9635 5206 or at jane.martin@cancervic.org.au if you have any queries about this submission or the comprehensive steps required to curb childhood overweight and obesity in Victoria.

Yours sincerely,



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Deakin University



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