



Space race for health

BRIGID O'CONNELL
 Health reporter

HEALTH experts are calling on the Baillieu Government to pressure Victorian supermarkets to boost "healthy food spaces" and introduce new laws to stop junk-food companies claiming prime real estate on shelves.

New research from Deakin University's Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research claims that supermarkets in Melbourne's most socio-economically disadvantaged suburbs have an average of 6½m more shelving space devoted to junk food compared with stores in wealthier suburbs.

And not only are stores in poorer areas more laden with chips, chocolates and lollies, they have a lower ratio of fresh produce to junk food than their richer neighbours.

Coles spokesman Jim Cooper said he rejected the claims of the study.

"We simply do not stock our stores in this manner, nor is shelf space sold as claimed," he said.

The study, discussed by Dr Adrian Cameron and Dr Lukar Thornton at a conference held by the Deakin University centre last week, surveyed 35 Coles and Woolworths stores across Melbourne's most and least socio-economically disadvantaged suburbs.

Among the more shocking results were that supermarkets in poor suburbs stocked an average of 4m more soft drink — including 1.3m extra of Coca-Cola — plus an additional metre of chips.

The research also highlighted Australian supermarkets' obsession with junk food at checkouts compared with other countries, with 4 per cent of Dutch checkouts stocking soft drink compared with 42 per cent in Australia.

Obesity Policy Coalition senior adviser Jane Martin called on the State Government to pressure retailers to devote more in-store promotion to fresh foods.

"People in the poorest areas have the poorest diets

and the poorest health outcomes and this is just another way these vulnerabilities are being exploited by these big companies," Ms Martin said.

"Junk foods are always in the prime places in supermarkets and it's no mistake they're there — they pay for that.

"We're sitting on a time bomb as far as common cancers, diabetes and heart disease go."

Nutrition Australia's Aloysa Hourigan said legislation was needed to make it easier for people to buy healthy foods.

Kathryn McFarlane, a spokeswoman for Health Minister David Davis, said the Government had no plans to curb the promotion or availability of junk food in supermarkets and was instead focusing on school canteens, community gardens and shopping centres as part of a \$40 million war on childhood obesity.

[oconnellb@heraldsun.com.au](mailto:connellb@heraldsun.com.au)

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