



Doctors want to put the fear of fat into you

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HEALTH

GRAPHIC advertisements showing damaged vital organs or people drinking liquefied body fat should be used to shock Victorians into giving up junk food and sugary soft drinks, health groups have proposed.

The Australian Medical Association says campaigns promoting healthy eating habits and exercise have failed to curb the obesity epidemic and shock tactics are now needed.

In a submission to the state government seen by *The Sunday Age*, the AMA describes obesity as "Victoria's most pressing public health issue", and calls for a \$25 million advertising blitz to help tackle the crisis.

They want a campaign modelled on recent New York City health department ads, which showed a man drinking a beaker full of body fat, and shovelling down 16 sachets of sugar.

Health Minister David Davis said he would consider funding the AMA's proposal as part of its next budget and it recognised "the importance of tackling obesity as a significant public health issue".

The American print and TV ads warned that just one sugary soft drink a day over a year can make you up to five kilograms fatter and increase the risk of obesity, diabetes and heart disease.

The proposed campaign could also include ads that graphically show the damage excess fat can do to the body, similar to Quit smoking commercials.

"The ads that we're proposing would highlight the negative effects of obesity on your vital

organs," said Dr Harry Hemley, president of AMA Victoria.

"As people gain a lot of weight and become obese, excess fat is gradually deposited on the surface of the heart, as well as the loose tissue around the kidneys and liver and other supporting tissues within the abdomen.

"With an extra layer of fat, which could be several inches thick, the heart has to work a lot harder to pump blood around the body.

"Instead of showing a person inhaling cigarette smoke, an obesity ad could go into the body of an obese person and show the heart struggling to beat with a thick layer of fat.

"Alternatively, it could borrow from Quit's autopsy-style advertisements and show the heart of a healthy person, compared with the visibly distressed, enlarged and fat-coated heart of an obese person."

An estimated 60 per cent of Australian men, 45 per cent of women and one in four children are overweight or obese. The cost of obesity through lost productivity, premature death, disability and medical treatment, is more than \$58 billion a year.

The Obesity Policy Coalition — a public health lobby group comprising the Cancer Council, VicHealth, Diabetes Australia-Vic and the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention at Deakin University — has backed the AMA's proposals.

The coalition's senior policy adviser, Jane Martin, said the New York ads were effective as a viral campaign because they were so shocking they caught people's attention. "Graphic advertisements such as those used by Quit

have also been shown to be very effective in raising awareness and influencing behaviour change," she said.

However, weight management specialist Rick Kausman disagreed, warning that the plan could cause anxiety and distress for those battling obesity.

"The reasons why people become above their most healthy weight are so complex and so individual, we can't just raise awareness without giving people an appropriate map to help them make a change when they're ready. People already feel judged

and shamed and if we pour more of that on top, then it's just going to make the situation worse. People will turn off and not listen, or feel worse about themselves," Dr Kausman said.

Underlying emotional issues were often behind weight gain, he said, and healthier messages, encouraging people to slow down at meal times and only eat when hungry, would be better.

The AMA's proposals are part of a submission calling for \$63 million to fight obesity.

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