



Junk food, drink target

Fat tax to fight obesity crisis



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UNHEALTHY food and drinks should be taxed at least 20 per cent to tackle the obesity crisis, an international review says.

It comes as a coalition of health bodies continues its push for a fat tax and subsidies on healthy foods.

More than 70 per cent of Australians support an increase in the price of junk food and cheaper prices for healthy food, according to a survey by the Obesity Policy Coalition.

In a review of evidence, the British experts say the 20 per cent tax should be combined with subsidies on healthy foods, such as fruit and vegetables.

OPC senior adviser Jane Martin backed the two-pronged approach, but said more evidence was needed to determine the optimal level of tax.

"There also needs to be a focus on low-income communities as they are the most affected group,

and they have the poorest diets," she said. Lead researcher Dr Oliver Mytton, of Oxford University, said price was an important determinant of food choices and diet.

Dr Mytton found while a "fat tax" could improve health, it would need to be at least 20 per cent to have a significant effect on obesity and heart disease.

Studies predict a 20 per cent tax on sugary drinks in the US would reduce obesity levels by 3.5 per cent, and a 17.5 per cent tax on unhealthy foods in the UK could cut up to 2700 heart disease deaths a year. It comes as a study of Australian families has revealed more than half of parents are concerned about their kids not getting enough exercise.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies report also found almost 40 per cent of parents are worried their kids are eating too much junk food.

Denmark and Hungary have introduced a "fat tax", and others are considering it.

But the Australian Government has so far failed to move on the issue.

The research is published in the *British Medical Journal*.

In another move aimed at cutting the availability of junk food, a Melbourne council is considering rate increases of up to 400 per cent for fast food giants such as McDonald's and Darebin Council's move could be followed by other councils concerned about the spread of junk food chains despite warnings about illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease.

Councillors voted to explore the option as part of a wider campaign against Type 2 diabetes after they were told that using planning controls against the outlets would not work.