



Fast food giant's move into junior sport 'unethical'

SHANE FOWLES

A DEAKIN University centre is among health agencies calling for junk food promotion to be banned from children's sports as it also pushes for tax measures to encourage better eating.

The Obesity Policy Coalition (OPC) has slammed a McDonald's initiative called Mac Pack, featuring AFL stars such as Buddy Franklin and Scott Pendlebury, labelling it "underhanded marketing" and "unethical".

The OPC - which includes Deakin's Centre for Obesity Prevention - has called on the State Government to ban junk food firms from sponsoring junior sport, believing it goes against efforts to address unhealthy eating.

Research shows that a quarter of Geelong teenagers are overweight or obese, with the city seeing a rising rate of unhealthy youth that experts believe needs to be confronted in children's early years.

The city has also been selected as one of 14 areas across Victoria to take part in a new health initiative, which will include Jamie Oliver's Ministry of Food project.

OPC executive manager Jane Martin said linking unhealthy food and junior sport was "unethical" given children's limited ability to recognise marketing messages.

"Increasingly we are seeing unhealthy food companies attempting to buy themselves a 'healthy halo' by associating their brand with junior sport," she said.

"It is a marketing strategy,

pure and simple, not an altruistic interest in funding sporting clubs or helping kids to improve their handball skills."

The Mac Pack provides training and nutrition tips from Franklin, Pendlebury and Marc Murphy, while telling kids to have fun and be a good sport.

A Cancer Council Victoria survey found more than 70 per cent of people agreed that junk food outlets should be restricted from sponsoring children's sport.

The OPC is also pushing for a junk food tax and subsidies for healthy foods, which has gained momentum as Darebin City Council considers lifting rates on fast food chains.

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- Obesity Policy Coalition executive manager JANE MARTIN