



“ Healthy eating messages are not enough. Policy and programs must be part of a comprehensive campaign for change

WHEN one in four Victorian adults is obese, the problem is bigger than the individual.

It's not about Jenny next door who should eat less takeaway, it's about asking what's driving nearly one million people to obesity.

The recently released Health Monitor shows much of this is the result of what we put in our mouths, which is fewer fruit and vegetables and more processed foods.

So what's causing so many people to eat unhealthy food in quantities like never before? The answer lies in our environment, which influences behaviours through portions, price, promotion, availability and lack of information.

Think about this: Supersizing is actively encouraged by fast food chains through value-for-money offers; it's cheaper to buy soft drink than water; there are aisles dedicated to lollies, chips and biscuits in our supermarkets; and ads for junk food are inescapable.

In addition, a lot of processed foods are being promoted as healthy and labelling doesn't give people the full picture.



YES

Unless we address these factors, messages promoting the eating of more fruit and vegetables will not work.

New York City has taken a comprehensive approach to dealing with the issue for several years.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has implemented policies to make healthy choices the easy choices. One was restricting the size of sugary drinks for sale.

Our supersize culture has meant soft drink containers have grown exponentially over the past 50 years.

Taking out the larger sizes has meant the smaller size is now the default

option for many New Yorkers. There's nothing stopping people buying more than one, but the act of reaching for another makes them question whether they need it.

But this policy hasn't been implemented in isolation. More bike lanes have been built and there has been a focus on creating safe routes to schools.

All food served or bought by the City — including at functions, in schools, hospital and aged-care facilities — must meet nutritional standards.

NYC has also focused on reducing the promotion and availability of unhealthy food. Energy in calories is displayed at chain fast-food outlets, and heart disease-causing trans fats have been banned in all restaurants.

Green Cart street vendors have been set up in areas where access to fresh produce is limited, and stores are encouraged to increase aisle space for a greater variety of fresh foods.

This type of approach, where a change in policy is being used to change behaviour, can reap rewards.

In Victoria, we should take a bite out of the Big Apple's approach.

Jane Martin, executive manager, Obesity Policy Coalition

