



Ad code change deemed ineffectual

THE Obesity Policy Coalition (OPC) is claiming that the recent update of the Responsible Children's Marketing Initiative for Responsible Advertising and Marketing to Children (RCMI) will have little impact on 'junk food' advertising placed around the top 20 programs watched by children.

Following an independent review of the RCMI, the Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGC) announced that the code would be amended to cover advertising placed around programs that attract an audience of greater than 35 per cent children under the age of 12. This is down from 50 per cent previously. The code aims to cover all ad content that is 'directed primarily at children', and as well as the 35 per cent audience threshold, programs rated as P, C, G or PG are automatically covered by the code.

"The change from 50 per cent to 35 per cent brings us in line with international best practise," said AFGC chief executive Gary Dawson.

However, the OPC argues that even with this reduced threshold,

very few programs that are popular with children are captured by the code. Of the top 20 programs watched by children between 14 to 29 August 2012, only three programs attracted an audience share of greater than 35 per cent children. These programs were all broadcast on ABC TV, which does not run advertisements. The other 17 programs all attracted an audience share of between eight and 20 per cent children. Therefore, if the August viewing figures were taken as standard, the updated RCMI would make no difference to the ads shown. The main issue is that children only make up a small proportion of the total population (less than 20 per cent were under the age of 15 in 2011), so they'll rarely make up more than a small percentage of the audience when a program is viewed by a mixed demographic.

"Programs watched by the highest number of children (which are shown in evening viewing periods) are rarely covered by the RCMI and QSRI

(Quick Service Restaurant Industry Initiative) because these programs usually also have high numbers of adults in the audience," said the OPC's *Exposing the Charade* report. "Thus while large numbers of children may be present in the audience (e.g. during programs such as Junior Masterchef, X Factor and Australia's Funniest Home Videos), they may nevertheless comprise only a small percentage of the total viewing audience when large numbers of adults are watching."

"The code is very limited," said Jane Martin, senior policy advisor for the OPC. "I think industry is trying to look responsive, but in reality [the change] is going to do very little. The reduction in children's exposure [to junk food advertising] is not really impacted in a substantive way."

Dawson responded that the code has always clearly been geared towards programs that are 'directed primarily at children'.

"The code covers programs





fast facts

- The RCMI has been ammended to cover programs that have an audience of greater than 35 per cent children.
- 17 out of 20 of the top programs watched by children failed to reach this threshold (based on figures from 14 to 29 August).
- The three programs that attracted an audience share of greater than 35 per cent children were broadcast on ABC TV which does not run advertisements.

and advertising directed primarily at children," he said. "That's the point, if you're an advertiser and you're putting an ad into prime time programs then you're not going to be targeting that ad at children.

support for this recommendation by more than 20 public health groups, including the Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance, the Australian Medical Association, ANZ Obesity Society, the Dental Associa-

Of the top 20 programs watched by children between 14 to 29 August 2012, only three programs attracted an audience share of greater than 50 per cent children."

"It'll be targeted at adults because that's the audience, you'd be wasting your money showing an ad that's targeting children."

The OPC is calling for time-based advertising restrictions that would ban unhealthy food advertising on free-to-air TV from 6am to 9am and 4am to 9pm on weekdays, and 6am to 12pm and 4am to 9pm on weekends. It has received wide-spread

tion, and Nutrition Australia.

The recent independent review of the RCMI found that 74 per cent of signatories had voluntary exceeded the code's standards. Dawson welcomed the findings as evidence that self regulation has achieved industry action to focus marketing communications to children on the goal of promoting health dietary choices and lifestyles.