

TASKFORCESUBMISSION: submission

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POSITION: Executive Officer

ORGANISATION: Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society

SUBMISSION1: The Obesity Society welcomes the opportunity to respond to discussion paper prepared by the National Preventative Health Taskforce

The Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society (ANZOS) is a scientific organisation composed of obesity researchers, medical practitioners, dietitians, psychologists, scientists and other health care and educational professionals interested in improving our understanding of the problem and the prevention and management of obesity in Australasia. The Society has some 550 members throughout Australia and New Zealand and is the only national organization with a sole focus on obesity in Australia. As such it is well placed to provide broad-based, independent assessments of policies and proposed strategies to address the obesity epidemic in Australia.

The Obesity Society applauds the Taskforce report for presenting a coherent and comprehensive approach to the prevention of chronic disease in Australia through effectively addressing the key risk factors of obesity, smoking and alcohol consumption. In general, it is a well constructed and soundly argued document. The Obesity Society will restrict its comments to some of the issues and questions raised in relation to the prevention of overweight and obesity.

1, Overall focus

ANZOS believes that there are many potential benefits from an explicit focus on preventing inappropriate weight gain in the whole community (irrespective of their current weight status) rather than concentrating on those with an existing weight problem.

2. Targets and indicators for overweight and obesity,

Given the statement provided above, it would be appropriate to have a target for population weight status which better reflects changes in mean population BMI or waist circumference instead of simple prevalence of overweight and obesity. Setting indicators in relation to the volume of short consultations in primary care where we do not have firm evidence of benefit on weight control is problematic.

3. Engaging all sectors of society into action on obesity.

This is one of the greatest challenges for the Taskforce. However, the first stage must be to get a common vision on this issue within the major health professional and NGO groupings as divisions

and disunity in this constituency is currently limiting progression of ideas and preventing the full engagement of other sectors.

4. capacity building

ANZOS strongly supports the need to improve the skills and capacity of health and community workers addressing this issue. The society feels that poorly skilled and resourced professionals are contributing to a culture of ineffectiveness and hopelessness that current pervades much discussion about action on the prevention and management of obesity, ANZOS have already begun work in this area.

5. Ensuring public safety

ANZOS is particularly concerned about the exploitation of those with an existing weight problem by marketers of expensive weight loss products which have no scientific validity. The TGA needs to address this issue but it is also an important issue for pharmacists and their organisations as this is the major outlet for their sale and promotion.

6. Defining the best mix of interventions

ANZOS believes that the use of the "Promise Table" to produce a portfolio of interventions for the prevention of weight gain as proposed by Gill et al (2005) and Swinburn et al (2005) will allow a good mix on innovative programs and allow the selection of programs on a broader range of evidence.

7. Leadership and Coordination

ANZOS supports the establishment of a Prevention Institute to coordinate and drive action on prevention issues. However, the society believes that the institute will only be successful if it receives long term funding and sits at arms length from government influence and has a high level reporting structure similar to the Nutrition and Physical Activity Council in Norway or the UK Food Standards Authority.

Gill T, King L and Webb K. Best Options for the promoting healthy weight and preventing weight gain in NSW. Sydney, NSW Centre for Public Health Nutrition and NSW Department of Health 2005.

Swinburn B, Gill T and Kumanyika S. Obesity Prevention: A proposed Framework for translating evidence into action. Obesity Rev. 2005; 6: 23-33

PRIVACY: yes

SUBMIT: Submit