

## **CDPAC Position Statement**

### Obesity and the Impact of Marketing on Children



**Released: August 2008**

## Background:

In light of the relationship between childhood obesity and chronic diseases<sup>1</sup>, and taking into account the potential role that marketing plays in this relationship, the Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada (CDPAC) held a policy consensus conference on March 4 & 5, 2008 to examine the issue of “Obesity and the Impact of Marketing on Children”<sup>2</sup>. This conference brought together leading international and national experts to present the most current scientific, legal and social evidence on this pressing issue. An objective panel of broad-based prominent Canadians participated in the conference. The panel was tasked with: 1) examining the evidence presented by the expert presenters, and; 2) developing a consensus statement on the issue. The panel concluded that<sup>3</sup>:

- The marketing of food and beverages to children impacts on their food and beverage choices;
- The majority of foods and beverages marketed to children are unhealthy;
- Unhealthy food and beverage choices contribute to childhood obesity.

The panel also asserted that Canada’s current, self-regulatory approach to marketing to children was insufficient to deal with the issue and in need of reform given high rates of childhood overweight and obesity.

## Rationale:

CDPAC concurs with the panel statement, agreeing that the positive power of marketing should be harnessed, as it relates to healthy foods and beverages, and that industry media literacy and social marketing to promote active lifestyles and healthy dietary choices are welcome. However, we also agree that the direct marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children must end. To that end, we recognize that marketing to children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century goes well beyond TV advertising and comes in many other forms, therefore marketing prohibitions need to be comprehensive in scope in order to be effective.

CDPAC believes that:

- in order to tackle the obesity epidemic among children, a comprehensive approach is required;
- an integral component of such an approach must address the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to children;
- the current voluntary approach to the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages in Canada is insufficient, especially given the extent to which the chronic disease burden is exacerbated by obesity;
- addressing the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children is best done via a regulatory regime; and
- a key first step in the creation of such a regime would entail the development of definitions for unhealthy foods & beverages<sup>4</sup>, age thresholds that should apply to children, and an elaboration of how industry sponsorship prohibitions should apply.

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<sup>1</sup> Childhood Obesity and the Role of the Government of Canada. Public Health Agency of Canada, <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ch-se/obesity/obesity-eng.html>, 2007-08-23.

<sup>2</sup> Description of CDPAC Policy Consensus Conference on “Obesity and the Impact of Marketing on Children”, <http://www.cdpac.ca/content.php?doc=107>

<sup>3</sup> “Obesity and the Impact of Marketing on Children: Policy Consensus Statement”, <http://www.cdpac.ca/media.php?mid=433>, March 28, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> The United Kingdom has developed such a definition.

## **Recommendations:**

### **1) That the federal government - and if necessary other governments in Canada - introduce regulatory regimes to comprehensively prohibit the direct marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children.**

This prohibition would go beyond TV advertising, and would include, among other marketing mediums, a ban on sponsorships for those companies whose product lines consist of a significant amount of unhealthy foods and beverages.

In order to accomplish this, the federal government should establish a multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral task force to develop:

- a definition of unhealthy foods/beverages;
- an appropriate age threshold to define what constitutes a “child”; and
- criteria to determine how sponsorship prohibitions should be implemented. For example, a sponsorship prohibition could apply to any company where a specified proportion of that company’s food and beverage product line is deemed to be unhealthy<sup>5</sup>.

### **3) That the food and beverage industry, in collaboration with civil society and governments, augment the marketing of healthy foods and beverages to children.**

In addition to the prohibition of marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children, there should be collaboration between governments, the food and beverage industry, non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders to augment the marketing of healthy foods and beverages to children.

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<sup>5</sup> The concept underlying this recommendation implies that it is neither fair nor feasible to prohibit sponsorships from companies that have negligible numbers of unhealthy products in their product lines.