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by email

Health Promotion: Marketing of Unhealthy Foods to Children

Food environments around the world are making it harder and harder for children to access and afford healthy diets that appeal. The food and beverage industry plays a strong part in driving this transition towards unhealthy food, where highly processed, unhealthy foods and beverages are now promoted more than ever before. The World Health Organisation believes that children deserve to live, learn and play in spaces where nutritious and affordable food is available for all. They should be protected from promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages and families and caregivers should be supported to provide healthy diets. The food and beverage industry, government, health professionals and the public need to work together to set higher standards around food marketing to children.

Why We Should Care About Marketing

Clear evidence shows that unhealthy food marketing is highly persuasive and powerful in influencing children. It creates social norms around foods and eating, increases children's preference and consumption of ultra-processed foods, and is strongly linked to childhood obesity¹. In Australia there is about 129.5 million dollars spent each year by the sugary drinks industry alone in advertising, which is significantly more than public health advertising across Australia². There is a large amount of unhealthy food promotion in areas children frequently attend or watch, including on Australian television, outdoor signage near schools, public transport, children's sports centres, sports sponsorships and supermarkets³. Children's sporting clubs are a particularly popular setting for unhealthy food and beverage advertising and make up the majority of canteen sales at local sports clubs. Public transport is another strong setting for unhealthy food and beverage advertisement, with about 75% of children seeing an advertisement for unhealthy food or drink on their way to school³.

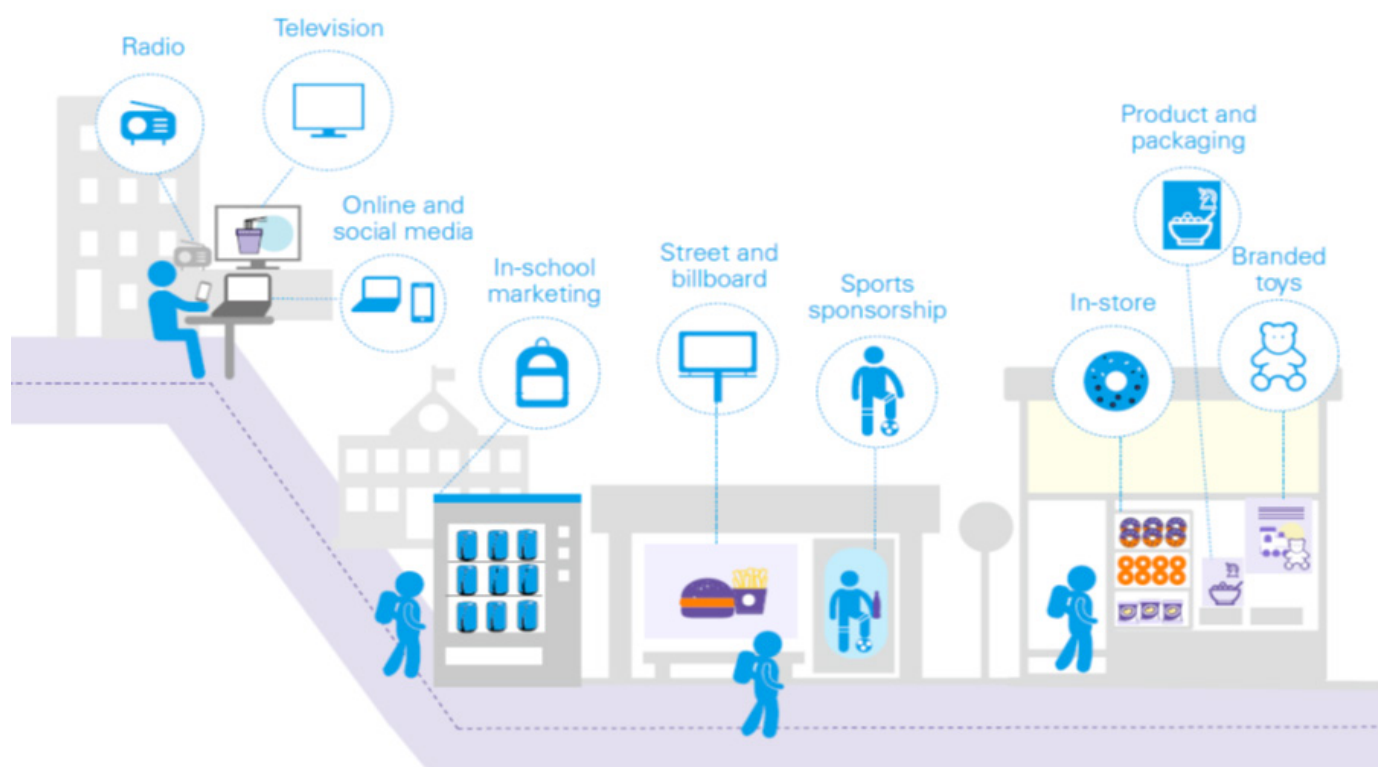


Image Credit: World Health Organisation



Current Australian Laws

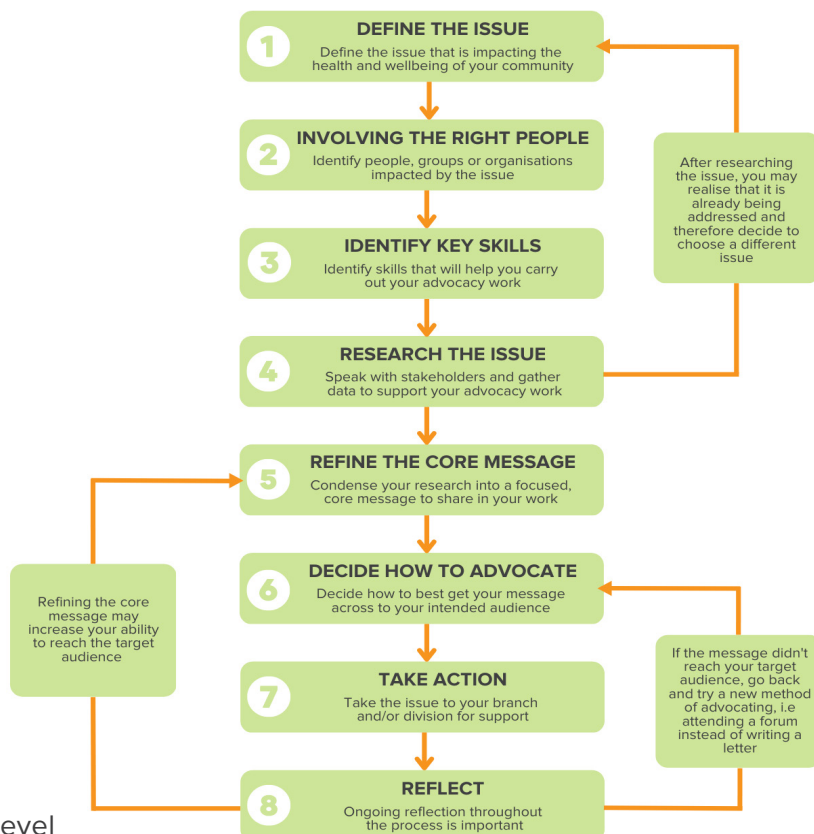
WHO's marketing recommendations underline that it is the governments' role to lead development of policy to reduce the impact of unhealthy food marketing on children. There is currently no Australian Government regulation to specifically protect children from unhealthy food marketing. There is some limited regulation around children's free-to-air television, but although this does include some restrictions on advertising, these are not about reducing children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing. While parents have a key role to play in their children's food choices, it is unrealistic to expect parents to consistently refuse children's requests for products, when these requests are encouraged by unhealthy food industry marketing. The Public Health Association of Australia believes that governments have a responsibility to provide an effective regulatory system to protect children from the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages³.

What You Can Do: Advocate

While the marketing of unhealthy food and beverage to children is a large and complex issue, there are still steps you can take as a Country Kitchens Facilitator to reduce children's exposure in your community! Starting small, such as focusing on one local supermarket or community centre, is a great place to start in reducing the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages. Level 6 on the Country Kitchens PATHway encourages you to identify and advocate for health-related issues that affect your community.

The Eight Step Advocacy Process developed by Country Kitchens provides a step-by-step approach for you to build and deliver an effective community health advocacy campaign. Level 6 Facilitator Training will take you through an example focused on advocating addressing healthier drink options at a local sporting club canteen.

We encourage you to attend our upcoming Level 6 training in November, you can register via your facilitator login on the website, or reach out to your Country Kitchens buddy.



¹ World Health Organization. (2012). A framework for implementing the set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children.

² Cancer Council. (2023). Alarming data prompts international expert's calls for stronger policy to protect Australian kids from junk food advertising.

³ Public Health Association Australia. (2021). Marketing of Food and Beverages to Children. Background Paper.