



Regulation of Take Away and Fast Food Outlets

Background

The prevalence of overweight and obesity is a national concern with approximately 63% of Australian adults and a quarter of children overweight or obese.ⁱ Similarly, Ballarat is also facing the challenges of obesity and lifestyle related health issues and has one of the highest incidences of cardio vascular disease in Victoria.ⁱⁱ

Local data reflects that:

- 61% of adults living in Ballarat are overweight or obeseⁱⁱⁱ
- 34% have high blood cholesterol^{iv}
- 32% have high blood pressure^v
- 13% of adults in Ballarat are daily sugary drink consumers compared to Victoria 11.2%^{vi}
- 91.6% of workers in Ballarat who had a WorkHealth check between 2009 – 2012 reported inadequate fruit and/or vegetable intake^{vii}

A recent mapping of Ballarat food outlets found Take Away and Fast Food* make up 26% of the total food outlets in the Ballarat LGA compared with green grocers at 2%.^{viii}

In Ballarat Central, the majority of food outlets are cafes and restaurants, however in suburbs with SEIFA (Socio-Economic Index for Areas) scores indicating a higher level of disadvantage, such as Sebastopol and Wendouree, there appears to be a higher proportion of takeaway and fast food outlets compared to supermarkets, bakeries and greengrocers.^{ix}

Studies have found that residents of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods tend to live closer to major fast food chains, with evidence indicating that the lowest income postcodes had 2.5 times more fast food restaurants than higher income postcodes.^x Studies have also found that there is a greater density of fast food restaurants in close proximity to secondary schools in all areas and close to primary and secondary schools in more socio-economically disadvantaged areas.^{xi}

A systematic review of peer reviewed studies examining obesity prevalence relative to fast food density, reported that approximately half found a positive correlation between higher obesity and living in areas with high access to fast food.^{xii}

Local environments in which Australians go about their lives, can have a significant impact on behaviours that influence rates of overweight and obesity, and significant reforms to the planning systems are needed to align planning policy goals with this pressing public health challenge.^{xiii}

BCH Role

Across our region there is currently a significant commitment to action and a growing groundswell of interest to improve health outcomes for our communities. Healthy eating and active living have become a particular focus, featuring as key priorities for prevention work at BCH and across other health and wellbeing organisations and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans.

In 2017, the Central Highlands Regional Partnership funded the Prevention Lab to strengthen obesity prevention effort in the Central Highlands of Victoria and identify and act on key opportunities and leverage points for action.

Within this project, BCH are taking a lead on exploring opportunities to advocate to all levels of Government for regulatory changes to make it easier for people in Central Highlands to make healthy food choices. The initial focus is on advocating to State Government for a change in planning legislation/policy to allow flexibility to local governments in controlling the placement and density of fast food outlets

Key Messages

- Ballarat has a significant number of adults (and children) who are overweight or obese and at high risk of cardiovascular disease.
- Ballarat has a high proportion of take away and fast food outlets in areas of high levels of disadvantage.
- There is a positive correlation between high obesity levels and density of fast food outlets.
- Local environments in which Australians go about their lives, can have a significant impact on behaviours that influence rates of overweight and obesity.
- Planning laws operate largely without regard for public health goals. Efforts by Local Government to shape healthy food environments can be undermined by existing planning laws that allow for fast food outlet density and placement without consideration for the health impact and sentiment of the community.
- Significant reforms to planning systems are needed at State and Local Governments to align with planning policy goals that support development which promotes, rather than undermines health.
- Amendment to the Victorian Planning Provisions is required to allow local councils flexibility in controlling fast food outlets, including zoning amendments that require permits for all fast food outlets regardless of zone; consideration of current fast food outlet density in the area; proximity to schools and health indicators of the community.

Ballarat Community Health provides advocacy to government, professionals and the community in this area.

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REFERENCES

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ⁱⁱ Prevalence of Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) in Victoria, Heart Foundation

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Health and Human Services 2016, Victorian Population Health Survey 2014. Modifiable risk factors contributing to chronic disease

^{iv} Social Health Atlas of Australia, Victoria, data by Local Government area, May 2016 Release 2

^v Department of Health and Human Services 2016 Victoria Population Health Survey 2014. Modifiable risk factors contributing to chronic disease

^{vi} Department of Health and Human Services 2014, Victoria Population Health Survey 2011-2012.

^{vii} Monash Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health (2012) Worksafe Work Health Checks, LGA profile report

^{viii} Supporting Food Security in the City of Ballarat, 2018 Research Project for Ballarat Community Health and City of Ballarat; Monash University Nutrition and Dietetic Students – McNeice E; Minogue A; Payne M; Right N
^{ix} Ibid

^x Reidpath, D.D., Burns, C., Garrard, J., Mahoney, M., & Townsend, M (2002). An ecological study of the relationship between social and environmental determinants of obesity. *Health Place*, 141-145

^{xi} Thornton, Luker E., Lamb, Karen E., Ball, Kylie (2015). Fast food restaurant locations according to socioeconomic disadvantage, urban-regional locality, and schools within Victoria, Australia.

^{xii} Fleischhacker, S. E., Evenson, R., Rodriguez, D.A., & Ammerman, A.S. (2011). A systematic review of fast food access studies. *Obesity Reviews*. 12 e460-e471

^{xiii} Obesity Policy Coalition., Policy brief: Prioritising Health: Reforming planning laws to reduce overweight and obesity in Australia.

*The mapping of food outlets conducted in the "Supporting Food Security in the City of Ballarat 2018 Research Project: identified Takeaway and Fast Food outlets as the following:

Takeaway: food outlets identified as smaller, independent stores (non-chain or franchise stores) such as fish and chip shops. **Fast food:** food outlets identified as chain or franchise fast food stores such as McDonald's and KFC