

## **Consultation on the review of The Code for Advertising to Children and The Children's Code for Advertising Food**

From: Compass Health

Contact: Josette McAllister, Senior Advisor Māori and Population Health  
Phone: DDI +64 4 2396119; Mobile +64 21 791640  
Email: [josette.mcallister@compasshealth.org.nz](mailto:josette.mcallister@compasshealth.org.nz)  
Address: City Fitness Building, Level 3, 1 Walton Leigh Avenue, Porirua 5022

---

Thank you for the opportunity to put a submission on The Code for Advertising to Children and The Children's Code for Advertising Food.

Compass Health commends The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)'s decision to move the review of these codes to coincide with the work being undertaken across sectors as part of the childhood obesity plan. It demonstrates a joint commitment to addressing childhood obesity.

The focus for our organisation's feedback is on the marketing of food to children rather than the general code.

It is pleasing to note that your review panel will take an evidence based approach to changes and amendments. We are also happy to see that you have a Public Health Strategic Advisor on the Review Panel.

We note and support the ASA's consideration on risks to children in the Advertising Code from a public health perspective. A study by the Institute of Medicine (as cited in Gantz, et al 2007)<sup>1</sup> concluded that "Television advertising influences the food preferences, purchase requests, and diets, at least of children under the age 12 years, and is associated with the increased rates of obesity among children and youth." Hoek & Gendall<sup>2</sup> (2006) also assert that advertising contributes to health issues such as obesity because unhealthy eating behaviours are reinforced and normalised in many advertisements. This is for example evident in advertisements that encourage up-sizing which in turn normalises unhealthy portion size eating.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gantz, W.G., Schwartz, N., Angelini, J. & Rideout, V. (2007). *Food for thought: Television food advertising to children in the United States*. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Retrieved from <https://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/7618.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Hoek, J. & Gendall, P. (2006). Advertising and obesity: A behavioral perspective. *Journal of Health Communication*, 11(4), pp. 409 – 423. DOI:10.1080/10810730600671888

Historically the advertising industry has framed food consumption as a matter of parental responsibility but this has so far only seen a rise in obesity. It is time to reframe this issue in the Code as a societal responsibility.

We support the Code for Advertising to Children's stance on not portraying violence or sexual imagery, not displaying anti-social behaviour, not showing gambling and no use of weapons and showing unsafe acts.

The Children's Code for Advertising Food needs a lot more consideration. Our organisation would like the Code to unequivocally state that advertising should support the role of the parents in educating children to have a balanced diet and be healthy individuals. The code currently states that advertising will not undermine the role of the parent. Our organisation does not deem this to be enough. Reducing childhood obesity needs full commitment across sectors, supporting parents and children with the delivery of consistent healthy messages.

Minimising screen time for children is encouraged by many professionals to be less than two hours per day. However children are still exposed to a large number of advertisements even with reduced screen exposure. In answer to your question "what changes if any, are necessary to protect the rights of children and their health/wellbeing?", we support the Obesity Action Coalition and Fight the Obesity Epidemic (FOE), in proposing a complete ban on advertising of all high fat, high sugar, and high salt items during children's television programming times.

In Principle 1, Guideline 1(c), "Advertisements for treat food, snacks, or fast food should not encourage children to consume them in excess." the Code focuses on "excess" consumption which is a subjective term. It would be far better to be specific and align the recommendation to nutrition guidelines<sup>3</sup>.

Our organisation recommends cessation of competitions and use of children's characters, and celebrities in food advertisements that are high on fat and sugar. This encourages repeat purchase and consumption. A good example of this is the promotion of McDonald's Happy Meals where children receive a toy with every meal. The toys are usually released as a series and prompts repeat purchase to collect the whole series.

Our organisation supports that advertising of foods high in sugar should not claim to be "low fat" or "fat free" which we know clearly misleads many consumers.

We support advertisers not being able to influence or mislead consumers to believing a product is healthy for them just because they contain some healthy ingredients, e.g. chocolate milk.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Health, 2015. Current Food and Nutrition Guidelines  
<http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/eating-and-activity-guidelines/current-food-and-nutrition-guidelines>

Our organisation is opposed to well-known public figures advertising products that are high in fat, sugar and salt. Often these people are role models and this can influence what children are purchasing or asking their parents to purchase. One specific example of this is nutritionist Nikki Hart advertising Nutrigrain (11 grams of sugar per serve). Additionally, well-known sports people are used to endorse high sugared “sports” drinks for consumption on the sports field. This encourages the belief that children need these products to be high performing athletes. A public figure advertising products influences people’s purchasing decisions and this is especially concerning when they promote high fat or high sugar foods.

Here are some answers to questions you have asked that we have not answered above.

1. The Children’s Codes currently define a child as under the age of 14. Do you support or oppose this definition? Why?

We consider this a good definition of a child for this purpose; it allows for ranges in maturity and aligns with the 2006 Institute of Medicine findings.

2. Is there a role for a nutrient profiling system such as the Health Star Rating system in the Children’s Codes? If yes, in what way and which system would you suggest?

Yes there is. We support extension of the Health Star Rating Scale system to food advertising in order to provide consistent information to consumers about the nutritional value of foods.

3. Do you support or oppose combining the two current codes? Why?

The complexities of food advertising warrant a separate code. There are also reasonable dissimilarities in people’s attitudes to food advertising and general advertising to children. For example parents are more likely to prevent children’s exposure to violent advertisements than they would to food advertisements; although the repercussions may be similarly damaging.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Review of the ASA Code for Advertising to Children and the Children’s Code for Advertising Food.

Josette McAllister