

## 2. Nutrition and Obesity

The obesity crisis in Australia has hit an all time high.

- In 2003, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that high body mass was responsible for 7.5% of the total burden of disease in Australia.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2005, obesity and its related diseases cost the Australian government and its taxpayers \$21 billion dollars.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2004-05, 54% of Australian adults were classified as overweight or obese.<sup>3</sup>
- Recent reports state that 90% of Australian adults do not consume the recommended amount of 2 fruit and 5 vegetables per day.<sup>3</sup>

It has been established that nutrition education programs implemented in the community produce less significant results compared to environment and policy changes.<sup>4</sup> Evaluation of the Penrith Food Project outlined 5 key nutrition areas that need to be addressed in order to improve the nutrition of the population:

1. Improving access to food retail outlets and transport
2. Expanding the availability of healthy choices
3. Increasing community facilities and support breast feeding
4. Promoting local agriculture
5. Increasing the safety of the food sold

The Cancer Council NSW recently performed a food basket study across the state.<sup>5</sup> Cost, quality and availability of a healthy food basket was assessed comparing areas and specific demographics within the population. Results showed considerable variation across variables and the Cancer Council recommends that a price surveillance mechanism be introduced by the Federal Government. Furthermore, they recommend nutrition and purchasing education programs for specific demographics, such as those with low socio-economic status. Other reviews of the literature have confirmed the Cancer Council's findings and state that income and affordability are some of the largest barriers to nutrition.<sup>6</sup> The inconsistencies between cost and availability of healthy foods, especially in rural areas, is a pressing issue in Australia.

So, who will take responsibility for obesity and poor nutrition in Australia? Rosemary Stanton, 2009, believes government intervention is the answer.<sup>7</sup> Stanton recommends a ban on junk food advertising to children, establishment of exercise and food requirements in schools, 'traffic light' food labelling on all food and drinks and a major overhaul of the urban environment to promote active transport and physical activity.

What do you think should happen to combat the force of obesity and poor nutrition in Australia? Rosemary Stanton is a speaker at the upcoming **Hungry for Change - NSW Food Summit: Illawarra Regional Forum** which will be held on Wednesday July 1<sup>st</sup> 2009. To register log onto [www.healthyillawarra.org.au](http://www.healthyillawarra.org.au) .

References:

- (1) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007 as cited in (3)
- (2) Access Economics 2006 as cited in (3)
- (3) Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004-05, 'Overweight and obesity in adults', catalogue no. 4719.0, Canberra, Australia.
- (4) Webb, K, Hawe, P & Noort, M, 2001, 'Collaborative inter-sectoral approaches to nutrition in a community on the urban fringe', *Health Education & Behaviour*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 306-319.
- (5) Cancer Council NSW, 2007, 'NSW Healthy Food Basket: Cost, Availability and Quality Survey', [www.cancercouncil.com.au/foodbasket](http://www.cancercouncil.com.au/foodbasket) .
- (6) Burns, C & Friel, S, 2007, 'It's time to determine the cost of a healthy diet in Australia', *Aust & NZ J of Public Health*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 363-5.
- (7) Stanton, R, 2009, 'Who will take responsibility for obesity in Australia?', *Public Health*, vol. 123, pp. 280-282.