



# Submission fights obesity in children

SOFT DRINKS would be slugged with a 20 per cent tax and fast-food companies wouldn't be able to advertise on TV until 9.30pm under a series of recommendations put to the government by some of the country's leading nutrition experts.

The Centre of Research Excellence in the Early Prevention of Obesity in Childhood (CRE-EPOCH) has called for urgent action to tackle the growing waistlines of kids aged between one and five.

In a submission to a Senate Inquiry into Australia's obesity epidemic, the group says by age five, one in four Australian children are overweight or obese.

"That's more than a million children who are an unhealthy weight (and) these children have a much greater chance of becoming obese adults, and consequently face increased risks of developing chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer," the submission says.

"In one year, the excess cost to the Australian government of health care for preschool-aged children with obesity is estimated to be \$17 million," the submission states.

The CRE-EPOCH submission, led by Louise Baur, a paediatrician and expert in childhood obesity, asks the government to consider making "bold changes" including

introducing a soft drink tax set at 20 per cent, new laws to ban the daytime

advertising of junk food and new social media marketing restrictions for sellers of unhealthy products.

It also calls for improvements to be made to the Federal Government's Health Star Rating system and for clearer guidelines around added sugars, particularly for kids' foods, as labels often disguise when sugar-laden fruit juices have been used to sweeten products such as yoghurt.

"Current restrictions on marketing to children are voluntary and industry-led and they do not include food packaging," the submission says.

"There is substantial evidence that these voluntary codes are insufficient to reduce the impact of advertising to children."

Professor Baur wants federal MPs to consider following the lead of countries such as Chile, which has mandatory black octagon labels on foods high in fat, sugar and salt and has banned the marketing of infant formula to promote breastfeeding.

The group has also called for GPs to step up their role in the fight against childhood obesity by regularly carrying out height and weight checks for kids, and providing more consistent advice to parents on nutrition, physical activity and screen time.



Photo: SBS