



International Obesity TaskForce

The Sydney Principles:

Guiding principles for achieving a substantial level of protection for children against the commercial promotion of foods and beverages

The need for guiding principles

The protection of children from commercial exploitation is a societal responsibility. The epidemic of obesity, which affects millions of children in affluent and less affluent countries alike, has many drivers with an important one being the high levels of commercial marketing of foods and beverages that specifically target children. Controls on this marketing consistently rate as one of the high priority strategies for addressing childhood obesity. Several evidence reviews have concluded that marketing to children is dominated by energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods and that it clearly influences children's food preferences, positive beliefs, and food consumption. This marketing will inevitably undermine the efforts of parents and governments to promote healthy eating and runs contrary to the objectives of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health which has been endorsed by 192 countries. To support national and transnational efforts to progress this issue, the International Obesity Taskforce (IOTF) developed a set of principles to guide action on changing marketing practices to children.

The development of the Sydney Principles

Following a WHO Forum and Technical Meeting on the issue of marketing to children in May 2006, an IOTF Working Group drafted a set of rights-based principles which were initially distributed for feedback at the International Congress on Obesity in Sydney, Australia in September 2006. A global consultation on the 'Sydney Principles' then occurred from November 2006 until April 2007.

The scope of the Sydney Principles

The Sydney Principles were defined to cover the commercial promotions of foods and beverages to children. If applied, the Principles should ensure a substantial level of protection for children against exposure to commercial promotions of obesogenic foods and beverages, and make a significant contribution to a multi-strategy approach to reduce childhood obesity across society.

1. **Social marketing:** The principles do not consider issues related to social marketing campaigns funded by governments or non-commercial sources.
2. **Definition of a child:** The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a 'child' as under the age of 18 years but recognises that, for different situations, definitions may use a younger age. All children are affected by both the obesity epidemic and commercial marketing, however, a stepped approach may be needed to account for the greater vulnerabilities of younger children.
3. **Products to be covered:** Restrictions on the commercial promotion of **all products** to children most faithfully adheres to a rights-based approach. It sets the highest ethical benchmark and is achievable in societies which place an over-riding value on protecting children. Application of the principles to either **all foods and beverages** or **all energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods and beverages** are less restrictive options which take more of a risk-based approach attempting to balance commercial outcomes and child health outcomes. These latter two approaches would provide a valuable contribution to the efforts to curb childhood obesity while the first mentioned approach extends beyond the obesity and health agendas.



International **Obesity** TaskForce

The Sydney Principles

Guiding principles for achieving a substantial level of protection for children against the commercial promotion of foods and beverages

Actions to reduce commercial promotions to children should:

- 1. SUPPORT THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN.** Regulations need to align with and support the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Rome Declaration on World Food Security which endorse the rights of children to adequate, safe and nutritious food.
- 2. AFFORD SUBSTANTIAL PROTECTION TO CHILDREN.** Children are particularly vulnerable to commercial exploitation, and regulations need to be sufficiently powerful to provide them with a high level of protection. Child protection is the responsibility of every section of society – parents, governments, civil society, and the private sector.
- 3. BE STATUTORY IN NATURE.** Only legally-enforceable regulations have sufficient authority to ensure a high level of protection for children from targeted marketing and the negative impact that this has on their diets. Industry self-regulation is not designed to achieve this goal.
- 4. TAKE A WIDE DEFINITION OF COMMERCIAL PROMOTIONS.** Regulations need to encompass all types of commercial targeting of children (e.g. television advertising, print, sponsorships, competitions, loyalty schemes, product placements, relationship marketing, Internet) and be sufficiently flexible to include new marketing methods as they develop.
- 5. GUARANTEE COMMERCIAL-FREE CHILDHOOD SETTINGS.** Regulations need to ensure that childhood settings such as schools, child care, and early childhood education facilities are free from commercial promotions that specifically target children.
- 6. INCLUDE CROSS BORDER MEDIA.** International agreements need to regulate cross-border media such as Internet, satellite and cable television, and free-to-air television broadcast from neighbouring countries.
- 7. BE EVALUATED, MONITORED AND ENFORCED.** The regulations need to be evaluated to ensure the expected effects are achieved, independently monitored to ensure compliance, and fully enforced.