

Australian Government Department of Health

Submitted by email to engage@thesocialdeck.com

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To Whom It May Concern,

RE: National Obesity Strategy

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Obesity Strategy Consultation Paper.

The APS is the premier professional association for psychologists in Australia, representing more than 24,000 members. Psychology is a discipline that encompasses the many facets of human experience and functioning at individual, family and social levels. A key goal of the APS is to actively contribute psychological knowledge for the promotion and enhancement of community wellbeing.

In general, the APS supports the Strategy and framework for action with its strong focus on prevention and the need to reduce stigma. It appropriately acknowledges that overweight and obesity is inequitably distributed across society and is the collective responsibility of individuals, communities and governments.

As a professional organisation committed to evidence-based practice, the APS is concerned that the Consultation Paper focuses on education with limited inclusion of the overwhelming evidence of the role of psychosocial factors in the development of obesity and in recovery from obesity.

Proposed priority area 2 in the Consultation Paper emphasises the role of education and skills with limited mention of the need for, in complex cases, professional assistance to actually change behaviours (whether as an individual or group). The evidence shows that education alone is insufficient to facilitate behaviour change. Therefore, we suggest that the independent reviews of current evidence (Consultation paper p.12) be augmented by a more explicit review of the evidence base around the role of psychosocial factors.

Psychologists are specifically trained in behaviour change, with health psychologists having very high level skills in health behaviour change. However, there is limited government support available for such services under current funding arrangements.

The APS recommends that education, social and environmental infrastructure initiatives include psychological interventions tailored to support individuals to make lasting changes to their behaviour through attitudes, thinking, motivational and behavioural techniques.

The APS would be happy to provide further information upon request and would welcome the opportunity to be involved in the implementation of the Strategy.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frances Mirabelli', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Frances Mirabelli
Chief Executive Officer