



Coalition on Food Advertising to Children

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Speaking out against unhealthy food advertising to children

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The Coalition on Food Advertising to Children (CFAC) is grateful to the Australian Association of National Advertisers for an opportunity to respond to the Draft Food & Beverages Marketing Communications Code

CFAC makes the following comments:

1. The draft Code is not complete. It expresses the intention to address a broad range of commercial marketing communications but in fact only deals with Advertisements. Additionally the draft Code refers to Current Practice Notes to assist fuller interpretation, and these have not been made available for perusal and comment. It is therefore difficult to make a considered response to the draft code or indeed to be confident in the review and consultation process, with such inadequate material to assess.

2. The draft Code does not add clarity nor does it provide any additional protections to children. Many items in the draft Code are ambiguous and can be interpreted so as to allow advertisers to continue to advertise to children and parents in ways that they already do.

Specifically:

#3.2 refers to 'intended audiences'. This risks leaving children out; the issue is not who is intended to see them but rather who will see the advertisements. Such terminology leaves open an escape for many advertisers.

#3.3 and 3.9.2, refer to not undermining the importance of healthy lifestyles/ healthy balanced diets. Individual advertisements for individual food products can never be said to undermine healthy lifestyles or healthy diets, however it is the totality of current high volumes of food & beverage advertising of unhealthy foods that is undermining healthy eating practices among children. There are no standards in the draft code which address this problem.

The idea of 'excess consumption' expressed in #3.3 is a furphy; no ads shown to date specifically encourage excess consumption, nor do they portray overly large serve sizes.

3.4 says 'reasonable' when it should say 'reasonably'.

3.8 This standard aims to distinguish between advertising and editorial and content, It does not address the problem of undue pressure that comes from a trusted and credible personality promoting a product. This should not be limited to news and current affairs programs.

4.2 Ads 'directed to children' do not usually carry nutritional messages. Therefore this provision addresses a non-existent problem, and fails to address the real problem. What we have seen is advertisements for products generally consumed by children for example Kelloggs Coco Pops being advertised (ostensibly) to parents and carrying misleading information (by omission of the full facts). There is no doubt that these advertisements will be of appeal to children given their interest in the product and by hypothesis they (children) are even more likely to be misled by the advertisement. .

#4.3 This standard refers to advertisements not implying that children will be superior to their peers. It ignores the fundamental style of advertising to children that implies to children that they will be happier, stronger, more successful, more popular etc than otherwise if they consume the product, and not necessarily that they will be superior to their peers.

#4.4 This refers to advertisements not seeking to undermine parents' role. The very nature and clear intent of the content and volume of food and beverage advertising in Australia is to have the effect of undermining parents' roles in guiding children to make healthy food choices. TV is a powerful medium of education and information for children. The very fact that the majority of advertisements during children's peak viewing times promote unhealthy foods means that food advertisements are undermining parents' roles. The only real recourse to address this problem is restricting or banning food advertisements during children's peak viewing times, for which the AANA has not so far put up any standards in their draft Code.

#4.5 refers to advertisements not directly appealing to children to urge parents/care-givers to buy the products. Once again ads do not need to use direct persuasion techniques; this standard ignores the entire intent of ads that are designed to create desire in children for the advertised product, and consequently to use the power available to them 'pester power' to obtain the products.

#4.6 This standard is insufficient and the use of popular personalities should be prohibited in any commercial advertising to children, at children's peak viewing times and/or of products of primary interest to children.

There are many kinds of objectionable advertisements that are not addressed here. The Paddle Pop Lion's animated adventures for example ie the kind of ad that doesn't even show the product, or say what it is, but sells based on the brand and the mascot. Other examples that the draft Code leaves untouched are the promotion of Nutri Grain as 'iron man food' and the use of toys and giveaways, especially collectibles.

A recurring theme is that the code attacks ads of a kind that are never seen anyway presumably as they are not effective. It ignores the marketing tools now utilised, effectively providing free rein to advertisers to employ newly created and effective techniques. The Code must be contemporary and therefore should address developing techniques. It therefore needs to provide generic language that will capture these innovative advertising techniques as they develop.

Overall CFAC considers the draft Code disappointing in its lack of true commitment to ensure responsible advertising and to address the current concerns about the levels of unhealthy food advertising directed at children. The standards continue to be ambiguous and open to interpretation. Its focus is misdirected as it addresses advertising problems that do not actually exist. Most importantly it fails to tackle the core of the problem with food advertising to children, namely (1) the very raison d'être of advertising which is to create desire for the product (ie. pester power), (2) the subject matter of the advertisements (ie. unhealthy foods) and the volume and intensity of food advertisements watched by children, and (3) many advertisements are inherently misleading to children through their use of language, techniques and visuals, and that the Code does not show any attempt to provide practical guidance in avoiding misleading and deceptive practice. These are the real issues that a code needs to address in order to be meaningful and sincere about contributing regulatory measures to arrest childhood obesity.

Yours sincerely,

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Chairperson