



Level 2 180 Flinders Street Melbourne 3000  
Tel +61 3 9267 3744 Fax +61 3 9639 1622  
Toll free 1300 727 176

## **Victoria's Citizens' Jury on Obesity**

A submission by Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC)

1<sup>st</sup> September 2015

### **About the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC)**

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body representing students in Victoria. The VicSRC's vision is a world where all children and young people have access to education that is student-led, student driven and student focussed. The organisation exists to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education. The VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, and funded through the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET).

For more information or to speak to the VicSRC student Executive please contact:

Krista Seddon

VicSRC Manager

03 9267 3744

[manager@vicsrc.org.au](mailto:manager@vicsrc.org.au)

[www.vicsrc.org.au](http://www.vicsrc.org.au)

### **The Australian Obesity Epidemic: A look into Australian's naughty eating habits**

Written by Spencer Davis, VicSRC Student Executive member

The obesity epidemic has spread its way through the world like a wildfire, even Australia has been effected. This is only a recent issue, with the number of obese Australians doubling in the past 20 years (Monash University, 2013). It has left dieticians and public alike asking how it happened, and more importantly what can we do to stop it. Though many ideas have been presented, it is clear that the best way to fight this, is education. Educating young people is clearly the best way to counter a topic that affects thousands of young Australians. Education would highlight the wider benefits of a healthy diet as well as the dire consequences of obesity. Education would also cut the problem out at the roots meaning it would not just come back a generation later.

## **What is Obesity?**

Obesity is “The state of being grossly fat or overweight” (Oxford, 2012). This means a person that carries a dangerously large amount of excess weight, generally fat, that can cause a large deal of harm to the human body. It leads to a large number of heart/cardiovascular diseases as well as bone diseases and decay, it has also been proven to be a contributing to diseases such as osteoporosis and organ failures. It is usually caused by a lack of exercise, unhealthy diet or both.

## **Combatting Obesity**

### **Obesity in Young People**

As mentioned previously, the best cure for obesity is education. While education does not lead to a loss of fat, it is a strong prevention. With 25% of young Australians being obese (Australian Government, 2008) prevention is clearly a better option than a cure. While some organisations are trying to help educate Australia’s youth, putting more funding into and supporting current organisations will only help to smother this issue. This means that future generations will not find an issue in obesity like we of the present do. Education could lead to the abolishment of obesity. If obesity can be tackled in young people, it will also spread to the people in their life. Parents will be forced to cook more healthy foods and will feel a psychological need to keep up with the younger generation. This then creates a symbiotic health relationship between parent and child where both support the other to make healthy choices in their lifestyles. Education leads to helping all generation in the fight against obesity.

While education on the topic of obesity will help point out the flaws and dire consequences of an unhealthy lifestyle, it will also point out the benefits of a healthy one. Other methods of tackling obesity would not show the benefits of leading a healthy lifestyle and showing this to people is just as likely to convince them as the consequences are. Benefits of a healthy living include prevention of:

- Low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol (Bad cholesterol)
- Depression
- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- Cancer

And promotes:

- High density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol (Good cholesterol)
- Happier outcome on life

- Prolonged life
- Less chances of diseases later in life

Source: (InfoXChange Australia, 2015)

Showing these benefits is likely to convince Australians that are both young and old on leading a healthier life. Education can be done on a scale that no other method can, to all people. While the consequences of obesity are likely to scare people, showing the benefits through education is likely to inspire people to make the choice for a healthier life.

Education is the easiest method to combat obesity. While there are only few current organisations working directly to educate people on obesity, there are many other organisations using similar ideas and methods for other relevant issues. To target obesity, we wouldn't have to start from scratch but could instead work with existing organisations as a foundation to build upon, improve and expand current resources rather than fight an uphill battle to try something else. With 14 million obese Australians, adding small talks on obesity to things such as school visits, university orientation and work safety checks/professional development days would make a large impact (AIHW, 2015). It would also mean that less would have to be spent in resources and time of both the government and participating organisations. Since the work is based of a pre-existing program, both parties would only have to spend time and money on expansion and participating organisations wouldn't have to run a separate program. Therefore, education is not only the most effective method, but also the most efficient.

Education is clearly the best method of tackling obesity. It targets the problem at it's roots, is the most convincing through pointing out benefits, and is the most efficient. While other methods may be helpful, it is obvious that time and effort are best spent on education of the people. While it may seem an expensive and daunting idea at first, it will save hundreds of millions of dollars that Australians spend each year on obesity expenses (Victorian Government, 2015).

*“We must not constantly talk about tackling obesity and warning people about the negative consequences of obesity. Instead we must be positive - positive about the fun and benefits to be had from healthy living, trying to get rid of people's excuses for being obese by tackling the issue in a positive way.” -Michael Lansley (Lansley, 2008).*

## **Key discussion points**

Written by Margaret Tran, VicSRC Student Executive team

### **What have you learned about food, obesity and overweight that you think others should know?**

Life is about being happy in your body and about treasuring each day while it lasts. Being happy in your body means treating it right; nourishing it with healthy foods, shaping it with exercise and respecting it. I think that being overweight means that you're not happy in your body because you are not respecting it; you're not respecting your mind, your physical health and your social health.

### **What would make it easier for you and your friends to eat better?**

Food is an amazing necessity that we are fortunate to have. We should treat our self with delicious scrumptious sugary or unhealthy foods but only in moderation. Because healthy food doesn't always have to be boring

### **Do you believe anything needs to be done about Victoria's obesity issue? Why?**

Yes of course, Victoria's obesity issue is steadily increasing and so we need to act now. Obesity isn't just physical but it affects thousands mentally and internally. It is an illness/disease that can kill people because they are not educated about what they are putting into their mouths

### **How do you view the relationship between food choices, food environments and obesity?**

Fun healthy recipes help my friends and I to eat better - we get motivated off each other by talking about health programs that we have joined

### **What possible solutions do you think exist for government, industry and communities?**

- It is because of the increase in Fast Food chains, the increase in the hours that people are working and the increase in laziness that is spurring Victoria's obesity. So many people are so lazy to have home-cooked meals and so this results in people leaning towards "fast foods". Melbourne is the city of food and so obesity is unavoidable here.
- Encourage physical exercise and healthy eating by creating accessible phone apps that people can use to track their fitness - apps that give healthy tips - apps that provide free recipes.
- Run programs for girls in schools teaching them about body image and self-esteem.
- Ensure all young people find 1 type of sport or exercise they love to do. I.e. Yoga or Pilates.
- Limit screen time.

Written by Liz Chiem, VicSRC Student Executive Team

**What have you learned about food, obesity and overweight that you think others should know?**

That everything should be done in moderation and there must be a balance. Healthy eating plays a large part but so does healthy living, the increase in weight issues is mostly due to the lifestyle of excess. There is plenty of fast food available and the digital world further discourages people from exercising. Also being obese can lead to a huge range of short term and long term problems.

**What would make it easier for you and your friends to eat better?**

School and family influence. Usually you eat what your family prepares so it can either be unhealthy or nutritious. Also at school they teach you how to live healthy in health classes, education is important it teaches you what is good for the body and what isn't. The media to plays a part, there are countless images of 'perfect' bodies but if ways to achieve a healthy body were much more mainstream then I guess that could also make it easier to eat better.

**Do you believe anything needs to be done about Victoria's , obesity issue? Why?**

Definitely, something should be done about the rapid increase in levels of obesity.

- Higher increase of health related issues
- Cost of medical care
- Bad role models for younger generations
- Unsustainable for the environment

**How do you view the relationship between food choices, food environments and obesity?**

There all connected in some way they food choices people make impact on their health. If they choose to eat unhealthily they it leads to cases of being obese. Not only that but food choices affect what goods are being produced by the economy, if everyone is choosing to eat hamburgers for example they there will be a higher demand in beef. This will lead to more cow production taking up more grazing land having a negative affect in the environment.

**What possible solutions do you think exist for government, industry and communities**

- There could be more awareness programs/platforms encouraging people to eat and live healthy.
- Fitness programs within communities
- Educating about healthy lifestyles
- Food industry encourage healthy eating

Written by Simana Latu, VicSRC Student Executive Team

**What have you learned about food, obesity and overweight that you think others should know?**

I believe diseases that can branch off from obesity like diabetes, heart diseases, high blood pressure etc. if people are more aware of the illnesses and negativity from being obese or morbidly overweight it will knock some sense of reality and fear into the Victorians. I also think that Victorians should be aware of Health campaigns or organisations that help overweight problems, to promote the organisations more so everyone knows about it.

**What would make it easier for you and your friends to eat better?**

- If the unhealthy food we loved to eat lessened on the sugar and fat intakes in some sort of way.
- Promote more healthy home-made meals
- Maybe bring on new dieting options that aren't as bad to a point where we have to starve ourselves but just eat a smaller portion of a great meal.
- More healthy restaurants

**Do you believe anything needs to be done about Victoria's obesity issue? Why?**

Maybe to just start promoting the issue before it does get out of hand and it's too late. Basically, just promoting the issue of obesity and overweight with the impacts it causes so things don't get worse.

**How do you view the relationship between food choices, food environments and obesity?**

Our food environment here in Australia is pretty bad with all the fast-food restaurants and the amount of sweets is disgusting. Obesity isn't too much of an issue I'd say though but it is a rising situation that we can prevent. Food choice is all up to the person themselves, if they're smart enough to treat their body with respect and eat the right foods as well as to exercise regularly than great. But then there's also the choice of eating all the food you can get, binge eating and just being a couch potato.

**What possible solutions do you think exist for government, industry and communities?**

- Starting campaigns to promote the issue, making the issue a big thing in social networks and social media.
- Getting the issue out there and across Victoria.
- Maybe plan workshops or days to go out and teach people of the issue.