

Reducing Preventable Diseases and Saving Lives

Joint Statement from Australia and New Zealand's leading public health and consumer organisations on Proposal P1058 – Nutritional labelling about added sugars

Australia and New Zealand's leading public health and consumer organisations **strongly support** the introduction of mandatory added sugar labelling.

Added sugars contribute to increased weight gain, heart disease and type 2 diabetes. This burden has unacceptable impacts on the health and wellbeing of all Australians and New Zealanders. It is therefore the responsibility of the food regulatory system to ensure that consumers are informed when making food purchasing decisions.

Added sugar labelling will enable consumers to make informed choices in line with the Australian and New Zealand Dietary Guidelines, which recommend “limiting intake of foods containing added sugars”ⁱ and that consumers “choose and/or prepare foods with little or no added sugar”ⁱⁱ respectively. Recent research shows that 80% of Australian adults agree that added sugar labelling should be included on food products, and 78% agree that manufacturers should reduce the amount of added sugar in their products.ⁱⁱⁱ A recent consultation of 84 experts from 37 public health organisations recommended that the Federal Government “Continue efforts to introduce mandatory labelling of added sugars on all packaged food and drink”.^{iv} There is therefore substantial community interest in this issue.

After years of policy discussion, under proposal P1058, Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) is currently considering including added sugars information in Nutrition Information Panel (NIP) in response to a request from the Food Ministers Meeting. Following targeted consultation in 2022, we understand FSANZ will now take a series of options to its Board, and that one of those options is for added sugars not to be quantified in the NIP and that ‘no added sugar’ claim conditions are simply tightened to include a wider range of sugars (**Proposed Option**).

Public health and consumer organisations do not support this Proposed Option, or any proposed option whereby added sugars would not be quantified and listed in the NIP.

The Proposed Option:

- **Does not enable consumers to make informed choices consistent with national dietary guidelines.**
Both the Australian and New Zealand dietary guidelines recommend that consumers limit intake of foods containing added sugars. The Proposed Option would not provide consumers with the information necessary to make healthier choices with respect to added sugar. Most foods and beverages do not carry ‘no added sugar’ claims, simply tightening these claim conditions would not give consumers the information to compare the added sugar content of these foods.
- **Would be inconsistent with the Policy Guideline on Food Labelling to Support Consumers to make Informed Healthy Choices.**
The first policy principle in this guidelines states that food labels should provide adequate information to enable consumers to identify foods that do and do not contribute to healthy dietary patterns recommended in the dietary guidelines.

- **Would be inconsistent with the Food Ministers' determination on the best way to inform consumers.**

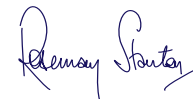
Food Ministers formally noted in 2019 that quantifying added sugars in the NIP best met the objective of providing adequate contextual information to enable consumers to make informed choices consistent with dietary guidelines recommendations i.e., "to limit intake of foods containing added sugars". This proposal ignores that determination, as guided by the constituencies of those ministers.

- **Relies on changes to claim conditions for foods that are not subject to nutrient profiling.**

Conditions for nutrition content claims related to added sugars would need to be considered if added sugar information was included in the NIP. However, products carrying nutrition content claims are not required to meet nutrient profiling scoring criteria. This means that products could still carry 'no added sugar' claims even though they are inconsistent with the dietary guidelines for other reasons, for example they are high in fat or sodium.

- **Is not consistent with what consumers want.**

Recent surveys have shown just how important this is to consumers with 80% or more of Australians and around three-quarters of New Zealand adults agreeing that added sugar should be shown in the NIP.^{v,vi,vii} A recent survey of Australian parents agreed "We need more nutrition information on food labels so consumers can make the right choices" (82.5%).^{viii}



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ⁱ <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/eating-activity-guidelines-new-zealand-adults-updated-2020-oct22.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Pettigrew, S., Booth, L., Dunford, E. *et al.* An examination of public support for 35 nutrition interventions across seven countries. *Eur J Clin Nutr* (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41430-022-01211-5>

^{iv}

Sacks G, Mann D. Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments: scorecard and priority recommendations for the Australian Federal Government, October 2022. Melbourne: Deakin University, 2022. Available from: <https://www.foodpolicyindex.org.au/>

^v Chen YJM, Morley B. Results from the Shape of Australia Survey 2022: Sugar labelling. Melbourne, Australia: Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, Cancer Council Victoria, Prepared for: Prevention Division; 2022 Oct. 87% of Australian adults surveyed agreeing that added sugar should be shown in the NIP.

^{vi} Pettigrew, S., Booth, L., Dunford, E. *et al.* An examination of public support for 35 nutrition interventions across seven countries. *Eur J Clin Nutr* (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41430-022-01211-5>. 80% of Australian adults surveyed agreeing that added sugar should be shown in the NIP.

^{vii} Consumer New Zealand. November 2022, Consumer survey. Unpublished data 73% of New Zealand adults surveyed agreeing that added sugar should be shown in the NIP.

^{viii} Riesenber D, Peeters A, Backholer K, Martin J, Ni Mhurchu C, Blake MR. Exploring the effects of added sugar labels on food purchasing behaviour in Australian parents: An online randomised controlled trial. *Plos one*. 2022 Aug 25;17(8):e0271435.