

# COST, EQUITY AND ACCEPTABILITY OF MARKETING RESTRICTIONS ON UNHEALTHY FOODS TO PREVENT CHILD OBESITY

## A NARRATIVE REVIEW

**Childhood obesity is rising globally and is predicted to affect 254 million children by 2030** - a 100 million increase in the course of a decade.\*

Countries worldwide have committed to a zero increase in obesity by 2025. To meet this commitment, governments are encouraged to **promote healthy behaviours and reshape obesogenic environments** through a variety of population-wide policies.

Limiting children's exposure to the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages is one such measure. Currently, **over 30 countries have some form of mandatory marketing restriction** in place.

While other reviews investigated the effectiveness of marketing restrictions for preventing obesity, the current review assessed the **cost and cost-effectiveness, equity and acceptability of interventions** to limit child exposure to unhealthy foods marketing.

### Cost and cost-effectiveness

Policies to minimise child exposure to the marketing of unhealthy foods are **low cost and highly cost-effective**.

Some global estimates find that marketing restrictions can lead to **a \$6.6 saving for every \$1 invested**. Out of 13 child-oriented obesity prevention policies, marketing restrictions were found to be the **most cost-effective** in the long-term.

### Equity

A **social gradient** may exist in child exposure to unhealthy product marketing. Children from lower socio-economic groups appear to watch more television and are therefore **more exposed to food advertising** than children from higher-income groups.

Moreover, students from **lower-income groups tend to eat more unhealthy snacks and more total calories** after being exposed to unhealthy food advertising.

This observation is also mirrored in the finding that marketing restrictions would result in 1.4 times **higher total cost savings** and 1.5 times **higher health benefits for the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups**.

### Acceptability

The **general population mainly supports marketing restrictions to protect children**, with some concerns raised regarding possible limitations to free speech.

**Health and consumer groups are strongly in favour** of legislative controls. Mandatory regulations are opposed by **commercial stakeholders as they prefer voluntary measures**.

Overall, the review concluded that **there is sufficient evidence for policy makers to adopt policies to limit the exposure of children to unhealthy food marketing** in order to tackle obesogenic food environments.





Science and Technology in  
childhood Obesity Policy

# Cost, equity and acceptability of marketing restrictions on unhealthy foods

## Mandatory restrictions on unhealthy food marketing are:



HIGHLY COST-  
EFFECTIVE



MODERATELY  
FAVOURABLE FOR  
HEALTH EQUITY



STRONGLY  
SUPPORTED BY HEALTH  
PROFESSIONALS and  
CIVIL SOCIETY



MODERATELY TO  
STRONGLY  
SUPPORTED BY  
PUBLIC



MODERATELY TO  
STRONGLY  
OPPOSED BY  
COMMERCIAL  
ACTORS

## More research needed on:

Different household  
income and parental  
education levels and  
ethnic groups

1



3

Linking marketing  
and consumption  
especially amongst  
children

Integrated marketing  
(use of multiple  
platforms)

2

4

Short-term cost  
impacts



MARKETING RESTRICTIONS SAVE \$6.6 FOR  
EVERY \$1 SPENT. IT IS THE MOST COST-  
EFFECTIVE CHILD-ORIENTED OBESITY  
PREVENTION POLICY.

