

## **CMA Submission:**

**CMA's Support for Bill S-228: *An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act* (prohibiting food and beverage marketing directed at children)**

**Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology**

**June 14, 2017**

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) is the national voice of Canadian physicians. Founded in 1867, the CMA's mission is empowering and caring for patients.

On behalf of its more than 85,000 members and the Canadian public, the CMA performs a wide variety of functions. Key functions include advocating for health promotion and disease/injury prevention policies and strategies, advocating for access to quality health care, facilitating change within the medical profession, and providing leadership and guidance to physicians to help them influence, manage and adapt to changes in health care delivery.

The CMA is a voluntary professional organization representing the majority of Canada's physicians and comprising 12 provincial and territorial divisions and over 60 national medical organizations.

## Introduction

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) is pleased to submit this brief to the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology in support of Bill S-228, An Act to Amend the Food and Drugs Act (prohibiting food and beverage marketing directed at children). The CMA has over 85,000 physician-members; our mission is empowering and caring for patients and its vision is a vibrant profession and a healthy population.

## Overview

The CMA is encouraged that the Senate is considering legislation that will protect children by prohibiting marketing of food and beverages directed to those under 13 years of age. We applaud Senator Nancy Greene Raine for sponsoring this important bill.

Obesity rates among children and youth in Canada have nearly tripled in the last 30 years. Obesity is of particular concern to Canada's physicians because it increases a person's risk of developing a number of serious health problems: high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, heart disease and stroke, type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, lower back pain and other musculoskeletal disorders, and many types of cancer. Type 2 diabetes, once found only in adults, is now being seen in children.

Health advocates are concerned that because of obesity, today's generation of children will have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. Children and youth who are obese are at higher risk of developing a range of health problems, and weight issues in childhood are likely to persist into adulthood. Diet-related chronic disease risk stems from long-term dietary patterns which start in childhood. Canadian statistics reveal children, consume too much fat, sodium and sugars (foods that cause chronic disease) and eat too little fiber, fruits and vegetables (foods that prevent chronic disease). The current generation of Canadian children is expected to live shorter less healthy lives as a result of unhealthy eating.<sup>1</sup>

## CMA's Cautions against Marketing

Children and youth in Canada are exposed to a barrage of marketing and promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages through a variety of channels and techniques – tactics which undermine and contradict government, health care professional and scientific recommendations for healthy eating. Research undertaken for the Heart and Stroke Foundation found that kids see over 25 million food and beverage ads a year on their favourite websites and that over 90% of the food and beverage product ads viewed online are unhealthy.<sup>2</sup>

Unhealthy food and beverage advertising influences children's food preferences, purchase requests, and consumption patterns and has been identified as a probable cause of childhood overweight and obesity by the World Health Organization.<sup>3</sup>

The CMA has long been calling on governments to explore ways to restrict the advertising and promotion of high-calorie, nutrient-poor foods. In 2006 CMA recommended that media advertising of high-calorie, nutrient-poor "junk" food in children's television programs be banned altogether. As the ways and means of advertising have expanded so too has our thinking, and in 2012 CMA adopted a policy on Restricting Marketing of Unhealthy Foods and Beverages to Children and Youth in Canada which called for the restriction of all marketing to children under 13 years of age of unhealthy foods and beverages. In 2014, CMA endorsed the Ottawa Principles and the Stop Marketing to Kids Coalition. The Ottawa Principles went further to help refine the definitions, scope and principles meant to guide marketing to kids (M2K) policy-making in Canada.<sup>4</sup> They recommend the restriction of commercial marketing of all food and beverages to children and youth age 16 years and younger. Restrictions would include all forms of marketing with the exception of non-commercial marketing for public education.

At present, Canada relies on voluntary industry codes to govern advertising and marketing practices. However, recent Canadian research into industry self-regulation has shown no reduction in children's exposure to ads for unhealthy foods.<sup>5</sup> The CMA believes that for maximum efficacy, regulatory measures are required to minimize the negative effect of food marketing on health. Only legally enforceable regulations have sufficient authority and power to ensure high-level protection of children from marketing and its persuasive influence over food preference and consumption.

Not only health organizations are in favour of restrictions on the marketing to children. Recent public opinion polling from Heart and Stroke's 2017 Report on the Health of Canadians highlights that 72% believe the food and beverage industry markets its products directly to children, 78% believe the food and beverages advertised to children are unhealthy and 70% feel that children are exposed to too much advertising by the food and beverage industry.

In her introduction of Bill S-228, Senator Raine noted that this is not the first time that legislation on this issue has come before the Canadian Parliament. The CMA sincerely believes that now is the time for action. We cannot delay any longer. Canadian children and parents need an environment free from the influence of food and beverage marketing in which to make health nutritious food choices.

## **Conclusion**

Childhood obesity and overweight are serious health problems in Canada, and as such are of great concern to the country's physicians and to the Canadian Medical Association. The causes, CMA believes, are rooted mainly in changes in our environment and their effect on our eating and physical activity habits. The consequences are extremely serious, both for individual Canadians' health and for the sustainability of Canada's health care system.

CMA believes that the way forward requires a number of different interventions, on many levels. The prohibition of the marketing of foods and beverages directed to children is one element of a wider healthy eating strategy that supports Canadians.

Once again, CMA commends the Senate of Canada on conducting this study. We urge support of the Child Health Protection Act and believe that it can assist in creating a social environment that supports healthy eating and healthy weight.

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Medical Association, Restricting Marketing Of Unhealthy Foods And Beverages To Children And Youth In Canada, A Canadian Health Care And Scientific Organization Consensus Policy Statement, December 2012

<sup>2</sup> Heart & Stroke (2017). The kids are not alright. How the food and beverage industry is marketing our children and youth to death. 2017 Report on the Health of Canadians.

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization. Set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> The Ottawa Principles, Stop Marketing to Kids Coalition, accessed at <https://foodsecurecanada.org/sites/foodsecurecanada.org/files/ottawaprinciples.pdf>, June 7, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Heart & Stroke (2017). The kids are not alright. How the food and beverage industry is marketing our children and youth to death. 2017 Report on the Health of Canadians.