

## Media release

### Under embargo until Wednesday 11 September 2013

#### **Health groups throw down challenge to Coca Cola: stop weight-washing and start taking meaningful action on obesity**

Peak health and community organisations have written today to senior leaders in Coca-Cola's Australian and New Zealand operations calling for the company to stop weight-washing the issue of obesity with expensive advertising, and instead take practical steps to address the core drivers of weight gain.

The group has outlined six key measures that Coca-Cola could implement if it was serious about reducing obesity levels in Australia and New Zealand:

1. reduce the sugar content of high-kilojoule beverages, such as Coke, Fanta and Sprite;
2. stop marketing high-kilojoule beverages to children and young people, including through high-rating TV programs and social media;
3. stop sponsoring sports clubs and events, especially children's sports;
4. stop the sale of high-kilojoule beverages in all schools and other children's settings;
5. stop promoting the message that high-kilojoule beverages are part of a healthy, balanced diet.
6. support physical activity initiatives, but without Coca-Cola or other high-kilojoule beverage branding.

Cancer Council Victoria, Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society, Diabetes Australia, Heart Foundation Victoria, Australian Dental Association, Physical Activity Australia, Nutrition Australia, The Parents' Jury, a Professor of Paediatrics and Child Health from the University of Sydney, and the Obesity Policy Coalition (which includes Diabetes Australia – Victoria and the WHO Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention at Deakin University) are all signatories to the letter.

"Coca-Cola has bombarded the public with ads suggesting they are not only committed to helping tackle obesity, but that they are part of the solution," said Jane Martin, Executive Manager of the Obesity Policy Coalition.

"If it really wanted to take responsibility and contribute to a reduction in obesity levels in Australia, the company would follow-through with our recommendations and not invest countless dollars in over-the-top marketing campaigns."

The Coca-Cola campaign included a TV commercial and large-scale press ads in major metropolitan newspapers.

"One can of Coke contains 10 teaspoons of sugar so it's no surprise they are sugar-coating their attempt to tackle obesity," said Ms Martin.

"With one in four Australian children overweight or obese, Coca-Cola's targeting of children and young people through advertising and the sponsorship of sports clubs and events is completely inappropriate.

"The 2012 'Share a Coke' campaign blatantly sought to increase Coke consumption amongst young people. With these sorts of campaigns Coca-Cola has consistently shown to have very little regard for the health of Australians, particularly teens," said Ms Martin.

The many negative effects of sugary drink consumption on children include lower intakes of calcium and protein and increased risk of tooth decay, with a clear link between drinking soft drinks regularly and weight gain and obesity for adults as well as children.

“Any serious attempt to reduce obesity in our children will require reducing sugary drink consumption, a point that is completely absent from the Coca-Cola initiatives,” adds Anna Peeters, President of the Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society.

The long term health risks of obesity include type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.

“Overconsumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and the associated health risks is a serious problem in Australia and comprehensive action is needed by governments and other organisations to address it,” said Greg Johnson, CEO of Diabetes Australia.

“A failure to act now will contribute to our growing public health crisis and escalating costs for individuals, families, communities and governments,” he said.

## The FACTS

### **Coke and other soft drinks are part of the obesity problem**

- Drink a can of sugary soft drink a day? That could lead to a weight gain of more than 6.5 kg in a year.
- A can of Coke, Fanta or Sprite contains at least 40g of sugar (around 10 teaspoons), and a 600ml bottle contains at least 60g (around 15 teaspoons).
- The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend that people limit intake of sugary soft drinks. The World Health Organization recommends that consumption of soft drinks should be restricted, and the World Cancer Research Fund recommends that consumption should be avoided.

### **Coke and other soft drinks are bad for your health**

- Drinking Coke and other sugary drinks increases your risk of developing type 2 diabetes and overweight and obesity.
- It's not just the kilojoules from the sugary drink that are the problem – people who drink these beverages tend to consume more kilojoules overall.

### **Coke and other soft drinks are bad for children's health**

- Children who drink lots of sugary drinks are more likely to put on weight and be obese.
- Drinking a can of soft drink each day significantly increases the risk of tooth decay and erosion.

- ENDS -

This is a joint media release between the following organisations:

