



# ANZOS

Australian & New Zealand  
Obesity Society

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## **ANNUAL ‘COUCH POTATO’ AWARDS RANK STATE V STATE ON OBESITY PREVENTION – 2013 RESULTS REVEALED**

**TASMANIAN GOVT AWARDED ‘COUCH POTATO’ FOR LACK OF ACTION ON OBESITY  
ACT STREETS AHEAD ON HEALTHY LIFESTYLE POLICIES & INITIATIVES**

The ACT Government has been given the ‘Gold Medal’ for obesity prevention for the development of its whole of government *Healthy Weight Action Plan*, the strong promotion of cycling and walking through urban planning policies, and mandatory school nutrition.

In contrast, the Tasmania Government has been awarded the annual ‘Couch Potato’ for its overall lack of action on obesity prevention, at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Australian New Zealand Obesity Society (ANZOS) in Melbourne today.

The ANZOS started the annual national ‘Couch Potato’ awards in 2008 to recognise and rank the efforts of Australia’s states and territories in relation to fighting obesity. This year the standard had improved across all jurisdictions.

Governments are given a score out of ten for a range of obesity prevention priorities and then ranked on their overall score. The rating involves comparing their progress around a range of key actions including cheaper and easier access to healthy food, reducing the marketing and promotion of unhealthy foods and creating opportunities for exercise through better urban design and access to facilities.

### **2013 rankings**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>State</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> – Gold Medal	ACT
2 <sup>nd</sup>	WA
3rd	NT
4th	NSW
5th	SA
6th	VIC
7th	QLD
8 <sup>th</sup> – Couch Potato	TAS

Chair of the ANZOS Public Health Sub-Committee and Executive Manager of the Obesity Policy Coalition, Jane Martin, said there were significant movements across the rankings this year.

“This year, the previous recipient of the Couch Potato, the Northern Territory has made significant improvements to come up to third position, while Queensland, which has topped the chart a number of times, has dropped to 7<sup>th</sup> place mainly due to a lack of a coordinated approach across government and wide-scale defunding of programs such as *Eat Well Queensland* and *Be Active Queensland*,” said Ms Martin.

“The ACT Government is currently leading the way with its newly released *Healthy Weight Action Plan* which sets the ambitious goal of zero growth in rates of obesity in the territory. In particular, the ACT Government should be commended for taking a whole of government approach including strategies targeting urban planning, social inclusion and workplaces. ACT has also flagged action in areas which have proven challenging for government such as reducing the promotion and availability of unhealthy food, and improving access to infrastructure to support active travel.

“Tasmania earned the ‘Couch Potato’ award for performing poorly in a number of key areas including the lack of mandatory provision of healthy food in school canteens, lack of action on menu labelling, lack of support for health services to provide advice on diet and exercise and a dearth of social marketing.

“Some excellent strategies and policies were implemented throughout the year including New South Wales’ *Fast Choices* legislation that mandates energy labelling on menus in fast food outlets, South Australia’s *Eat Well Be Active* program, Western Australia’s *Live Lighter* advertising campaign and the *Healthy Together Victoria*’s whole of government approach to obesity prevention.

“It would be great to see other states and territories following New South Wales’ lead and implementing kilojoule labelling on fast food menus,” she said.

Although all states and territories demonstrated some commitment to obesity prevention in 2013, the Society warned that further work in regard to labelling on packaged food and reduction in the exposure of children to promotion of junk food was needed at a federal level for a truly comprehensive approach.

“We need to see meaningful action by all governments including the Federal Government to reduce the amount of junk food marketing to children as this continues to undermine other efforts to curb levels of obesity,” Ms Martin said.

#### **How each state and territory is measured up**

The criteria checklist requires states and territories to score government action over a number of categories including policies, law reform, food access, social marketing campaigns, as well as state-wide monitoring and evaluation. These are assessed by the ANZOS Public Health Sub-Committee which collates the responses from experts in each state and territory and assigns the awards.