



MEDIA RELEASE: Embargoed to 5pm, Thursday 20 October 2011

Media contact: Shona Clarke – 0415 992 565/ 03 9635 5207

Queensland reclaims Gold Medal for action on obesity

Unfit NT wins 'Couch Potato' Award for third time in four years

The Queensland Government has been awarded 'Gold Medal' for the third time in four years for its action on obesity prevention at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Australian New Zealand Obesity Society (ANZOS) in Adelaide today.

In contrast the Northern Territory Government has once again been given the annual 'Couch Potato' award for its lack of progress on implementing obesity prevention initiatives.

The ANZOS started the annual national 'Couch Potato' awards in 2008 to recognise and rate the efforts of Australia's states and territories in relation to fighting obesity.

Governments are given a score out of ten for a range of obesity prevention priorities and awarded for their overall score. The rating involves comparing their progress around some 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.

Chair of the ANZOS Public Health Sub-Committee and senior policy advisor for the Obesity Policy Coalition, Jane Martin, said it was encouraging to see such a breadth of obesity prevention initiatives across Australia and a sign that governments were waking up to the reality of our obesity epidemic.

"This year has really shone a light on the benefit of forming alliances, both within government and with external organisations, in order to provide a joined up approach to the obesity crisis.

"Queensland is once again leading the way in obesity prevention. The key to Queensland's success lies not just in innovative policies such as Q2, which includes obesity targets for Queenslanders, it also benefits from the strong partnerships that exist between various levels and sectors of government and non-government organisations. While there is still more that could be done to address this complex issue, we'd encourage other states and territories to look to Queensland for inspiration," said Ms Martin.

Ms Martin also commended close second, New South Wales, for initiating the implementation of progressive policies, including being the first state to pass regulations to mandate energy information on chain fast food menus and in outlets which will be fully implemented by January 2012.

Although all states and territories demonstrated some commitment to obesity prevention in 2011, the Society warned that nationally further work was needed for a truly comprehensive approach. In particular, with the Blewett Labelling Logic report currently under review, the Society said

governments across the country had an opportunity to make a real impact by implementing such common-sense recommendations as traffic light labelling packaged food and fast food menus.

“We also need to see meaningful action from State and Federal Governments to restrict the advertising of junk food marketing to children as this continues to undermine other efforts by states and territories to curb levels of obesity in those who are most vulnerable,” said Ms Martin.

Commenting on the winner of this year’s Couch Potato Award, the Northern Territory, Ms Martin conceded that the territory had a great deal of challenges to overcome and that government had taken the first step in developing a strategic plan.

“Efforts must now focus on putting this plan in place and addressing issues such as the cost of food in rural and remotes areas compared with Darwin,” said Ms Martin.

The Society also acknowledged advances in breastfeeding programs and fostering better environments for walking and cycling.

How each state and territory 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.

Gold Medal: **Queensland**
Second: New South Wales
Equal third: South Australia and Western Australia
Fourth: Victoria
Fifth: Tasmania
Sixth: Australian Capital Territory
Couch Potato: **Northern Territory**