

Food system 'heading for crisis'

February 16 2012

Australians are eating themselves to death and our food choices are one of the nation's leading causes of environmental damage, according to a new report released today by the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA).

At today's launch of A Future for Food 2, the PHAA made an urgent call to the Federal Government to take responsibility for the crisis in our [food system](#) and establish a dedicated Ministry of Food with a position within Cabinet to drive cross-portfolio efforts.

PHAA Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Michael Moore said obesity and other diet-related disease were evidence of a serious failure of the current food system and a 'do nothing' approach will allow the system to slip into crisis.

"There is growing evidence that in Australia a poor diet contributes more to people being sick than any other single risk factor including tobacco and alcohol."

"[Australians](#) need to eat less and eat differently to address the sky-high rates of preventable diet-related disease. The current food system is skewed towards energy dense foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt. We need to make healthy food choices the easiest and most affordable option for all Australians."

The PHAA also believes that while the phenomenon of diet-related disease is grabbing headlines and what is not recognized is the significant

impact of our [food choices](#) on carbon emissions. The association pointed out that more than 30% of Australia's carbon footprint is related to food production.

According to PHAA Food and Nutrition spokesperson, Associate Professor Heather Yeatman from the University of Wollongong's School of Health Sciences public health nutrition has the responsibility to promote food that is not only healthy, but also environmentally sustainable.

“There is overwhelming evidence that certain diets and styles of eating impact more heavily on the environment than others. Fortunately, an environmentally sustainable diet is also a diet that protects against preventable disease,” Professor Yeatman said.

“Moving toward a plant-based diet with smaller amounts of meat from sustainable sources and reducing consumption of highly processed foods -- such as takeaway foods that rely on fossil fuel use in production, or use excess packaging -- will help to achieve two goals.

“These goals are reducing the incidence of diet-related disease and reducing the impact of the food system on the environment,” Professor Yeatman said.

Mr. Moore said working with the food industry was essential to implement changes in the food system, however, vested interests must not drive the policy decisions of governments. The food-related research and policy actions of government in the different sectors of health, primary industry, environment and social justice must also be connected.

“The Federal Government must lead the collaboration and establish a healthy, sustainable and fair food system with public and environmental health at its core,” Mr. Moore said.

More information: A FUTURE FOR FOOD 2 Report is available at [this site](#) .

Provided by University of Wollongong

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