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Prevention First Campaign
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Via email: meredythe.crane@fare.org.au

27 June 2015

Dear Mr Thorne

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Prevention First's Election questions.

Please see The Australian Greens' responses to your questions below. I apologise for the delay in responding.

A number of the priorities of your campaign are reflected in the Health Policy Platform of the Australian Greens. The Greens believe that prevention must form a significant priority of the Australian health budget, and share your frustration at the lack of focus on prevention in recent years.

The Greens are supportive of substantial investment in prevention. We would reverse the significant cuts by the coalition government to the Health Flexible Funds which we know provide essential funding for many effective preventive and public health programs around the country.

We have announced our policy for a 20% tax on sugar sweetened beverages with 5g or more of sugar per 100ml, in line with the recommendation of the World Health Organisation's recommendation for reducing childhood obesity. This measure is predicted to reduce consumption of these drinks by 12% and the Parliamentary Budget Office has predicted that this measure will raise \$2 billion over the forward estimates. The Greens have committed that we would reinvest every dollar raised through this measure into public and preventive health programs.

We launched the tax as one element of a broader obesity prevention strategy which also includes:

- Mandating clear food labelling laws to ensure families have accessible information about the food they buy and encourage reformulation of the least healthy products.
- Introducing effective restrictions on advertising of junk food to children and young people.
- Working with communities to ensure our urban environments support physical activity through better planning including \$250 million annual Active Transport Fund for bikes and walking infrastructure, to cut pollution, reduce traffic congestion and encourage physical activity.
- Investing \$20m to support disadvantaged families to assist with costs associated with children's sport and exercise to encourage uptake of physical activity from a young age.

More information about our sugar tax policy is available online here: <http://greens.org.au/sugar-tax>



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It has long been Greens policy for the introduction of a universal volumetric tax on alcohol to remove the perverse incentive created by the Wine Equalisation Tax (WET) and associated rebate for the production of cheap wine. We know that this cheap wine is favoured by young drinkers and those who drink at risky levels.

The Greens have significant concerns relating to the advertising of alcohol during peak times of children's viewing and will have more to say on this issue prior to July 2.

The Greens recognise the importance of clear, accessible information in encouraging people to make healthy choices. We are deeply concerned about the impact of significant junk food advertising to children and the impact of big junk food in influencing our decision making. We are supportive of public health awareness campaigns which provide information to consumers about health and wellbeing.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond to Prevention First's election survey.

Yours Sincerely,

Senator Richard Di Natale
Leader of the Australian Greens



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TAXING SUGARY DRINKS

Fighting childhood obesity

Healthy choices for a long and healthy life

Sugary drinks are a major contributor to Australia's obesity crisis. By taxing the sweetest and most harmful drinks, we can help reduce obesity, particularly in children, with the money raised invested back into public health programs.

Australia is facing an obesity crisis with 28% of adults now obese and 27% of children overweight or obese.¹ The highly processed, energy-dense food we consume is a major factor in driving obesity. Sugar sweetened drinks are a significant culprit, particularly for children.

> TAXING SUGARY DRINKS

A price increase of 20% on sugar sweetened drinks, or about 20 cents on a can of cola, is predicted to result in a 12% drop of in consumption – even higher for the highest consumers.² This could reduce obesity rates by more than 1% nationwide and help to protect children and young people from a life time of obesity. Our policy follows the general model used overseas, as follows:

- An **excise equivalent to 20% of retail price** levied on water-based beverages with more than 5g of sugar per 100ml
- Tax to be paid by producers or importers, not retailers.

And of course, **every dollar raised will be reinvested into public health, preventative health, and health education.**

A tax on sugary drinks is a key recommendation of the World Health Organization in their Ending Childhood Obesity report, as part of a suite of measures.³ This approach is supported by the YMCA, Australian Dental Association, the Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges, the Public Health Association of Australia, and even Jamie Oliver.⁴

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), National Health Survey: First Results, 2014-15

² Veerman JL, Sacks G, Antonopoulos N, Martin J, "The impact of a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages on health and health care costs; a modelling study", (2016) PLoS One, 11(4).

³ World Health Organisation, Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity, <http://www.who.int/end-childhood-obesity/final-report/en/>

⁴ <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/diet-and-fitness/uk-introduces-sugar-tax-on-soft-drinks-that-jamie-oliver-says-will-travel-to-australia-20160316-gnknxoz.html>

> A GROWING PROBLEM

Rates of obesity are growing around the world. Here in Australia, nearly two thirds of adults are overweight, with 28% of adults now obese.⁵ This trend is on a steady rise.

Even more alarming is the dramatic rise in the rates of childhood obesity. Over 27% of Australian children are now overweight or obese - up from just 7% 20 years ago.⁶

These trends will have dramatic consequences for the quality of life Australians can expect in the years to come. The rise in chronic disease, including heart disease and diabetes, means millions of Australians will live shorter and more challenging lives. Rising rates of chronic disease also put enormous strain on the health system. Australians, and our health system, will benefit if we can cut down on the amount of sugar we eat and drink.

> A FOCUS ON OBESITY PREVENTION

A tax on sugary drinks alone won't solve Australia's obesity crisis. The Greens would introduce this measure as part of a broader **obesity prevention strategy** which includes measures to work with the community on effective ways to improve our diets and increase physical activity. We will:

- Mandate **clear food labelling laws** to ensure families have accessible information about the food they buy and encourage reformulation of the least healthy products.
- Introduce **effective restrictions on advertising of junk food to children** and young people.
- Work with communities to ensure our **urban environments support physical activity** through better planning including **\$250 million annual Active Transport Fund for bikes and walking infrastructure**, to cut pollution, reduce traffic congestion and encourage physical activity.
- Invest **\$20m to support disadvantaged families to assist with costs associated with children's sport and exercise** to encourage uptake of physical activity from a young age.

⁵ AIHW: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/overweight-and-obesity/>

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Health Survey: First Results, 2011-2012

> SUGAR SWEETENED DRINKS A MAJOR CULPRIT

What we consume is a major contributor to the rise in obesity. More than a third of the energy adults eat is junk food, and for some children this can be more than 40%. Many of these products are high in sugar, recognised as a key driver of overweight and obesity.

The WHO released new guidelines for sugars, recommending that energy from “free sugar” (added by manufacturers, cooks or the consumer) is limited to less than 10% overall. Recent Australian analysis has shown that most adults and the vast majority of children exceed this, with the biggest source of added sugar coming from drinks.

Sugar sweetened drinks are amongst the worst culprits, loaded with sugar and devoid of any nutritional benefit. The average Australian adult consumes 7kg of sugar a year just from sweetened drinks.⁷ Kids in particular love these drinks. Overall, sugar sweetened beverages account for 20% of the added sugar intake for Australians, and up to 30% in those aged 14-30.⁸

Research also shows a direct link between the consumption of sugary drinks and being overweight, directly increasing the risk of diabetes.⁹

> PRICE DRIVES KIDS’ BEHAVIOUR

Research shows that when it comes to treats like sugar sweetened drinks, price can be a big factor in purchasing decisions. A rise in price means that more people will make the choice to drink something cheaper and healthier.¹⁰ Children and young people, are some of the highest consumers of sugary drinks, and are more responsive to price changes than many others in the community. So increasing the price will have a greater impact on encouraging kids to think twice before purchasing sugar-filled drinks.

A price increase of 20% on drinks sweetened with sugar, equivalent to about 20 cents on a can of cola or about 45 cents on a 2 litre bottle, is predicted to result in a drop of in consumption in excess of 12% and would be greater in those

who were the highest consumers,¹¹ and could reduce obesity rates by more than 1% nationwide.^{12 13}

> A MATTER OF CHOICE

We already put a price on other household commodities that cause harm like alcohol and tobacco to help us change our behaviour in a way that can have a real impact on our health, and the health of our children.

Countries around the world have similar policies, with good results. Finland, France, Hungary, and Mexico have all levied taxes on sugary drinks and in each case have seen a significant decline in consumption of up to 7.5% in a single year.¹⁴ The United Kingdom has recently announced their own levy on manufacturers of drinks with more than five grams of sugar per 100 millilitres.

Of course, the choice of what to eat or drink, is a personal one, and should remain so. A slight rise in the price of the most harmful, least nutritious foodstuffs available will simply send a signal - “think twice”.

> SAVINGS TO THE HEALTH SYSTEM

The Parliamentary Budget Office has estimated that this measure will raise more than \$500m in revenue per year, not including flow-on savings to the health system. A tax starting in September 2016 would raise \$2.1 billion over the forward estimates. With this money flowing into the health budget, we can use the revenue to improve the health of all Australians, which over time will also lessen the chronic disease burden on the health system.

A recent study has found that over 25 years, a 20% rise in the price of sugary drinks and flavoured mineral waters would save 1,600 lives.¹⁵ It would also prevent 4,400 heart attacks and 1,100 strokes. Over time, this would not only lead to better health for more Australians, but would lead to significant savings to the health-care system. This has been estimated to add up to \$609 million.

⁷ W Shrapnel, Trends in Sugar-Sweetened Beverages: Are Public Health and the Market Aligned or in Conflict?, *Nutrients*. 2015

⁸ Lei L, Rangan A, Flood M, Louie J. Dietary intake and food sources of added sugar in the Australian population. (2016) *Br J Nutr* 115, 868-877.

⁹ Hu F B (2013) ‘Resolved: there is sufficient scientific evidence that decreasing sugar sweetened beverage consumption will reduce the prevalence of obesity and obesity-related diseases’ *Obesity Reviews* 606-620

¹⁰ The Conversation, “Australian sugary drinks tax could prevent thousands of heart attacks and strokes and save 1,600 lives” 2016. <https://theconversation.com/australian-sugary-drinks-tax-could-prevent-thousands-of-heart-attacks-and-strokes-and-save-1-600-lives-56439>

¹¹ “The impact of a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages on health and health care costs; a modelling study”, (2016) *PloS One*, 11(4).

¹² E.g. 10% tax in Mexico reduced consumption by 12%. <http://www.insp.mx/eppo/blog/3659-reduccion-consumo-bebidas.html>

¹³ UK estimate found in Briggs ADM et al ‘Overall and income specific effect on prevalence of overweight and obesity of 20% sugar sweetened drink tax in UK’ *BMJ* 2013

¹⁴ Cornelsen and Carriedo: Health-related taxes on foods and beverages, 2015

¹⁵ “Australian sugary drinks tax could prevent thousands of heart attacks and strokes and save 1,600 lives” 2016.



ALCOHOL ADS ARE NOT CHILDS PLAY

Protecting children from alcohol ads

Closing the loophole that exposes our kids to harm

Young children are exposed to a barrage of ads for alcohol during programs that are broadcast in the time slots that are traditionally set aside for kids' viewing. The Greens have listened to community concerns and will restrict alcohol advertising to protect children from avoidable harms.

Alcohol advertising is harming children and young people. Research shows that alcohol marketing strategies lead to underage drinkers starting to drink, regular young drinkers becoming prone to binge-drinking patterns, and established young drinkers drinking at riskier levels which can place them at risk of harms.¹

While there are current regulations in place that provide some protections for children, alcohol advertising is permitted at any time of the day – including at the peak times for child viewing – so long as live sports or any sports related program is being broadcast.

Australian regulations are inadequate to protect adolescents and children despite the enormous community concern around alcohol advertising and promotion, and the Greens are the only party prepared to stand up to the alcohol lobby and put an end to them.

> ENDING THE BARRAGE

The Greens will tackle the issue of targeted advertising of alcohol to children by introducing legislation that will:

- **Set enforceable, national standard times** for child-friendly TV ads that would ban alcohol ads on commercial TV between 6am and 9am, and 4pm and 9pm on weekdays; and between 6am and 9pm on weekends and during school holidays.
- **Ban subscription television channels** dedicated to children's programming from showing alcohol advertisements.
- **Prevent companies from targeting underage customers** via email and smartphones with material promoting alcohol products.

¹ Impact of Alcohol Advertising and Media Exposure on Adolescent Alcohol Use: A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies Peter Anderson, Avalon de Bruijn, Kathryn Angus, Ross Gordon, Gerard Hastings Alcohol and Alcoholism May 2009, 44 (3) 229-243; DOI: 10.1093/alcac/agn115

> ALCOHOL ADS WORK

Experts agree that self-regulation in Australia has failed, allowing the bombardment of alcohol ads to continue.

Studies have shown that young people who are heavily exposed to alcohol advertising are 50 per cent more likely to start drinking in the following year than those lightly exposed.²

And 70 per cent of Australians believe alcohol advertising should be banned on TV before 8.30pm.³ Nevertheless, advertisers continue to target broadcasts during sporting and cultural events which appeal to younger audiences as major outlets for alcohol promotion.

> THE POWER OF TARGETED ADVERTISING

Research has demonstrated significant relationships between children's exposure to alcohol advertising, and drinking intentions and behaviours.⁴ Exposure to alcohol advertising has been found to shape young people's beliefs, attitudes and drinking behaviours with advertising messages concentrating on young people's goals of good times and social acceptance.

Children are exposed to a lot of alcohol ads. Recent research has shown that Australian children and adolescents are being exposed to as much alcohol advertising when viewing televised sport as young adults.⁵

² Rebecca L. Collins, Phyllis L. Ellickson, Daniel McCaffrey, and Katrin Hambarsoomians, M.S 'Early Adolescent Exposure to Alcohol Advertising and Its Relationship to Underage Drinking' J Adolesc Health. 2007 Jun; 40(6): 527–534

³ FARE, Annual alcohol poll 2016: Attitudes and behaviours, May 2016. <http://fare.org.au/2016/05/annual-alcohol-poll-2016-attitudes-and-behaviours/>

⁴ Academy of Medical Sciences. Calling time: the nation's drinking as a major health issue. A report from the Academy of Medical Sciences. London; 2004.

⁵ Carr S, O'Brien K, Ferris J, et al. Child and adolescent exposure to alcohol advertising in Australia's major televised sports. Drug and Alcohol Review 2015; DOI: 10.1111/dar.12326.

And despite the risks, codes governing advertising of alcohol to children contain loopholes allowing these ads to be screened at any time of the day during sports programs – the same shows that are amongst the most popular shows for children.

Australian children's exposure to television advertising is amongst the highest in the world, with children on average watching 15 hours or more of television per week.⁶ This must stop. There is no place for alcohol advertising at times traditionally set aside for kids.

The Greens will close the loophole, by taking decisive action to prohibit alcohol advertising when kids are traditionally watching TV.

> WHAT'S THE HOLD UP?

Parents are sick of the bombardment of harmful alcohol ads their children face and agree that something must be done to curb the influence of powerful alcohol industry promotion on Australia's children and young people. And doctors have called for Australian children to be protected from alcohol advertising.⁷

Tobacco control is the classic case where taxation, advertising bans and legislation served as the drivers for change with social marketing and education providing added value.

Given that alcohol causes 15 deaths and 430 hospitalisations each day in Australia, and when consumed irresponsibly, alcohol has devastating impacts on our community, including alcohol-related violence and foetal alcohol syndrome disorder, the Greens believe that this reform is both essential and overdue.⁸

As a community we already say it is unacceptable to advertise these products during kids' viewing times, but there is still this huge loophole through organised sports - so we have got to decide whether we want sport to be a vehicle through which we are sending kids positive messages about the value of exercise and team-work, or a vehicle for shoving messages about alcohol down our throats.

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics: 4364.0.55.004 - Australian Health Survey: Physical Activity, 2011-12

⁷ RACP/RANZCP Alcohol Policy, 2016.

<https://www.racp.edu.au/advocacy/policy-and-advocacy-priorities/alcohol>

⁸ Alcohol Advertising Review Board, Annual Report 2014-2015.