

NF7054 Nutrition and Food Policy
CW-1

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**The Effectiveness of Australian
Obesity Policy: A Critical Review**

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Background

Australia is a vast nation-continent with a growing and ageing demographic, its public health policies are increasingly focused on prevention of obesity. The abundance of healthy produce in the local markets throughout the year had a significant value among the Australians for healthy and seasonal ingredients. In the last decade the consumption of unhealthy processed food among the adult population is increasing rapidly due to the fast and busy life of working individuals (Lane et al., 2023). This increased the consumption of highly processed foods having high amounts of sugar and edible oils. (Machado et al., 2020; Marchese et al., 2022).

The National health survey conducted by Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2022) has mentioned the statistics for obesity and increased risk for diseases using body mass index and waist circumference as a reference in the year 2022. The data has been presented in Figure 1.1.

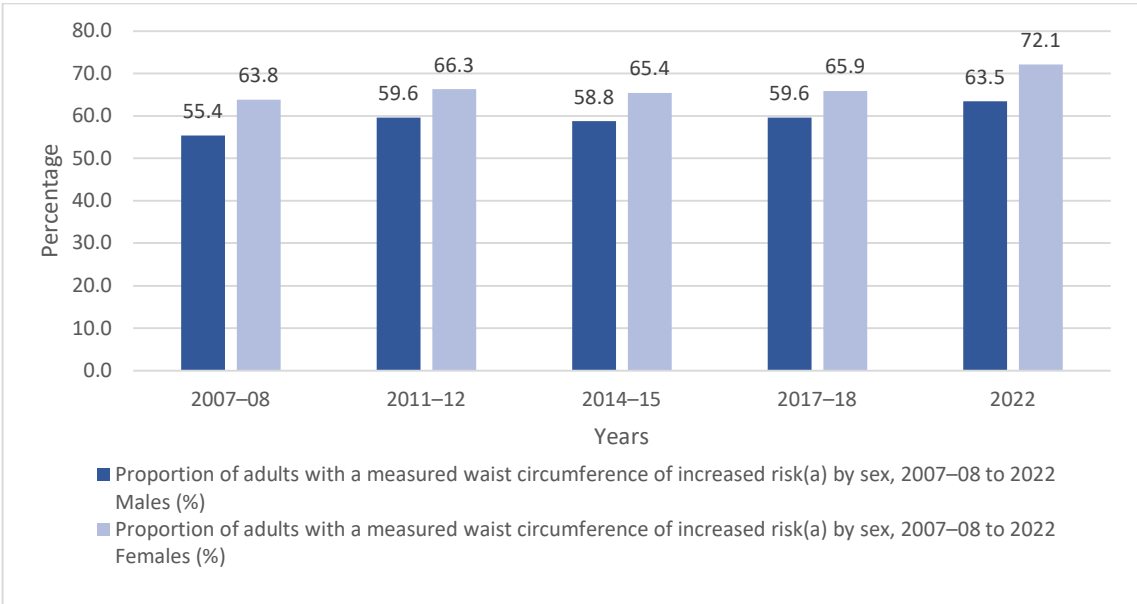


Figure no. 1.1 Proportion of adults with a measured waist circumference of increased risk by sex 2007-2022 (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2022).

According to Figure 1.1 females are more prone to obesity as compared to male population and in 2022 it is seen to be 72.1% of the female population was observed to have an increased waist circumference compared to the calculated average waist size of healthy females. For males it is 63.5% of the population at risk. Waist circumference is a good indicator of total body fat and hence prediction of chronic obesity related diseases (Moltrier et al., 2022).

Evaluation of policy framework

Australia recognizes obesity among the population as a major concern and has implanted many policies over the time tailored according to the modernization of lifestyle, immigration and change in work culture. The current policy which is in the run is the National Obesity Strategy which has a 10-year framework and was initiated in 2022. This policy was created based on the results of effectiveness of the previous policy called Healthy Together Victoria by Strugnell. et al., (2016) under Victorian government (Sothorn State government) in Australia which ran from 2012 to 2016 (DOH, 2015).

List of policies by Australian government

In Table 1.1 the major policies are mentioned along with their key objectives to ensure the effective comparison of results.

Sno.	Policies and Strategies	Year	Governing bodies	Key objectives
1.	National Obesity Strategy	2022-2032	Central Government	Prevent, reduce, and treat Obesity and overweight population by integrating all the results and observations of the previous plans.
2.	Healthy Together Victoria	2012-2016	Victoria State Government	Targeted schools, early childhood services and medium workplaces for learning, exercising activity integration and diet analysis.

3.	Healthy Food Partnership	2016-ongoing	Central Government	Promoting empowering and collaborating with food manufactures to increase healthier alternatives in the market.
4.	Western Australia Healthy Weight Action Plan	2019-2024	West Australian State Government	Support to families and individuals which are at-risk of overweight.

Table no. 1.1 Different Policies and strategies implemented by governing bodies in Australia (Strugnell. et al., 2016; AGDHAC, 2023; WADH, 2019; DOH, 2015;).

National Obesity Strategy has the target to provide early intervention and care and has the total focus on prevention. The strategy is 10- year based to reverse the trendline of increase in overweight population ratio over the time by implementing different sub-strategies like decreasing free sugar intake and simultaneously increase fruit and salad intake among the adults and children. Encouraging physical activity to reduce sedentary behavior and reduce total energy consumption while giving the access to early intervention and supportive health care. Implementation of strategies referenced from National Preventive Health Strategy (AGDHAC, 2021) is being mentioned in the policy. The calculated targets are being set which are referenced from WHO's non communicable diseases with set thresholds for year 2025 (WHO, 2022).

A Critical review of policy implementation

Obesity rate in Australia is increasing at an alarming rate. National Obesity Strategy is designed to tackle this problem and slow down the increment and gradually lower the cases (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022). Previous strategies have not been presenting successful results as rapid progress in ultra processed and unhealthy food industry is also seen over the decade which is overpowering the efforts of government. NSO has analyzed the failures and

shortcomings of previous policies and trying to overcome those obstructions by grooming the kids from a young age and directing them towards a healthy lifestyle. Events and seminars are being conducted to create awareness among the workplace environment of different industries. NSO has planned to adhere to the threshold given by WHO (Phelps. et al., 2024).

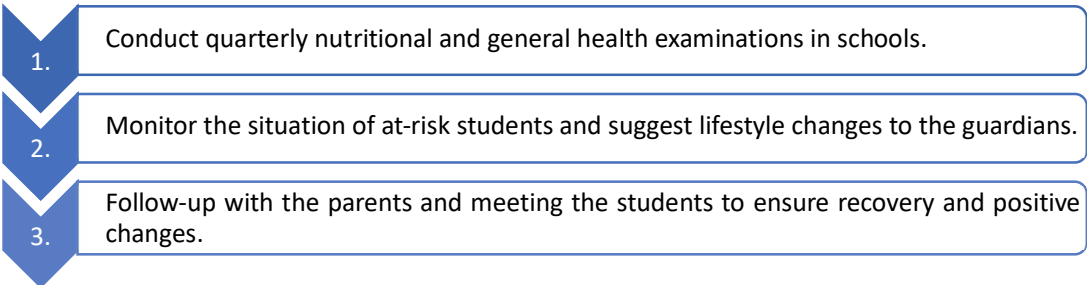
Government bodies is taking initiatives to increase physical activity for children by upgrading the infrastructure in societies like attracting them to parks by installing different kinds of swings and slides encouraging them to play and exercise more. Children’s crossing is being introduced to many roads within the radius of schools as to encourage parents living in the close vicinity to send their kids to school without using any commuting aid (Henry et al., 2024). The aims for the Strategy are pointed towards the right direction and will eventually have a positive impact on the numbers.

Online surveys conducted in Australia have reported that over 70% of the respondents agree that access to unhealthy snacks and provoking advertisements in public places like tube stations, bus stands and malls should be regulated by both Australia and United Kingdom government as this is a common problem in both the countries because this generates a craving among the younger generation and manipulate them to choose high calorie snacks instead of healthy snacks (Collins, Baker and Brookes, 2024). At the moment there is no such mention in the current policy.

In an analysis of socio-economic dynamics in Australia conducted by Ishida. et al., (2023), the higher education population has lower probability of getting obese whereas lower socio-economic group had higher chances of getting overweight, so the policy has already included educating and awareness raising in their goals is a positive sign.

Possible implementations

There are many technical solutions this chronic problem, but the budget and manpower remain a constraint for government bodies. One such solution can be periodical examinations conducted by health department in schools.

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1. Conduct quarterly nutritional and general health examinations in schools.
 2. Monitor the situation of at-risk students and suggest lifestyle changes to the guardians.
 3. Follow-up with the parents and meeting the students to ensure recovery and positive changes.

Standards and regulations for food industries should be updated according to the new health department norms.

Cycle to work scheme is being promoted for years by UK government and this is a very beneficial scheme for adults who do not get enough spare time during the day to exercise and hence they can burn a few calories while commuting and utilizing their time creating a perception among them of this task idea being productive.

Conclusion

The data from National Health survey conducted in 2022 suggests that two out of three adults are at risk of diseases due to overweightness and obesity. The National Obesity policy is a relatively new policy and hence is laying the groundwork for coming years. The approach is promising and will show observable results but as of now only infrastructural and foundational improvements is being in the limelight. Changes and alterations will be needed with time according to the yearly results to change the methods or target a specific geographical area.

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