

Advertisers Call for Review of Advertising Codes

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Press Release: **Association of New Zealand Advertisers**

Advertisers Call for Review of Advertising Codes for Children

It may seem counter-intuitive to some but advertisers are calling for the current Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) Codes¹ for advertising to children to be reviewed.

The Association of New Zealand Advertisers (ANZA) says that responsible self-regulation of advertising requires that advertising Codes are reviewed regularly to ensure they are fit for purpose. Given that many major food and drink advertisers have made a deliberate commitment to ensure they do not target their advertising to children, ANZA is keen to see consistency so that the commitment of responsible advertisers is not undermined.

At the same time, ANZA CEO Lindsay Mouat says that the current ASA Codes are more comprehensive than in many countries. “Calls to reduce advertising to children are typically repeated from overseas without reference to the standards already in place in New Zealand. For example the New Zealand advertising codes’ apply to all media – including brand websites and social media”.

“Unfortunately misinformation and sensationalism become an obstacle to progress on the thorny issue of food marketing and children. And the default becomes a simplistic call for bans on food advertising to children without recognising the tight controls already in place,” said Mouat.

Advertising and Obesity

Advertising remains an easy target in the clamour for action to address obesity. The reality is that for children, meal choices are largely made for them and the influencing factors on obesity are many and varied.

The UK Government commissioned Foresight study found that exposure to food marketing was found to be one of no less than 106 different variables². And the US Institute of Medicine concluded that at best food marketing has only a “modest direct effect” on the food choices, preferences and behaviours of children.

This is in no way meant to absolve food marketers of their responsibilities. If food marketing impacts children’s food choices at any level then food companies need to ensure that they are marketing responsibly.

Advertising Food to Children

In the debate on obesity, a common refrain is that television is awash with advertising to children. This is far from the reality.

Advertising in school-age children’s programme times is strictly limited. Any foods or beverages advertised in this zone must be approved under the Children’s Food (CF) classification against nutrient profiling standards³. The result is that only 5% of advertising in children’s time zones are for food or beverages.

And the *Getting it Right for Children*³ commitment allows for no advertising in pre-school time zones on television. In fact no advertising, sponsorship or prize packs are allowed during pre-school television programming.

Industry Commitment

At the same time many major advertisers have made a deliberate commitment to ensure they do not target their advertising to children.

Last year, the biggest multinationals, which form the International Food and Beverage Alliance wrote to the head of the World Health Organisation to make a series of new commitments on labelling, product reformulation and innovation and, notably, a reinforced commitment⁴ not to market food and drinks in any country that do not meet strict nutrition criteria to children under the age of 12.

“Advertisers are taking a responsible approach when it comes to food and children. ANZA would like to see the voluntary initiatives taken reflected in the advertising Codes.”

ENDS

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