



Media Release



Commissioner calls for more research on childhood obesity

The Commissioner for Children and Young People says there is an urgent need for current data on the issue of childhood obesity.

Robin Sullivan said the Commission for Children and Young People's latest snapshot of the wellbeing of children and young people in Queensland revealed a large increase in the number of children suffering from being overweight or obese.

The report also highlights gaps in recent data on the issue, particularly Queensland data.

In the ten years to 1995, the last year for which national data was available, the proportion of overweight and obese children in Australia almost doubled from around 11% to 21%.

"Although the data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is nearly ten years old, it provides a warning for both government and non-government agencies which provide services to young people in this state," Dr Sullivan said.

Lifestyle changes are believed to be largely responsible for the increase in children who are at an unhealthy weight, including:

- an increasing reliance on fast food high in fat and sugar
- decreasing levels of physical activity due to more time spent on computers and in front of the TV
- concerns about children's safety, giving them less freedom to walk to school or play unsupervised
- marketing of high fat/high sugar foods in children's peak viewing times, and
- decreasing breastfeeding rates.

The Commissioner says the report, *Children and Young People in Queensland: a Snapshot 2003*, also highlights a higher risk of obesity in children who are not breastfed for at least the first six months of life.

"In 2000, 41% of children under four were breastfed for less than six months, or had not been breastfed at all," the Commissioner said.

"This is a real problem, as recent research indicates that the prevalence of obesity is significantly lower in breastfed children."

A study of 32,200 Scottish children between 39 and 42 months of age in 1998 and 1999 showed that children had a 30 per cent reduced risk of becoming obese compared with formula-fed children. (*Lancet* 2002; 359: 2003-04)

"I'm pleased Queensland Health has made a commitment to promote the benefits of breast feeding and childhood nutrition in their *Strategic Policy Framework for Children and Young People's Health 2002 – 2007*," the Commissioner said.

"However, more comprehensive, current data on the issue is needed to address the causes of childhood obesity, rather than addressing the symptoms once they arise."

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