

## Theme: Improving food labelling and food literacy for all Western Australians.

*Important note: The information set out below is a snapshot of the evidence to guide collaborative and cohesive discussions at the Obesity Advocacy Target Food Focus forum 2019. It is not intended to be a comprehensive and/or exhaustive review of the all the available evidence related to the topic.*

### Why are we worried?

- Less than 50% of Western Australian adults can name more than 1 health problem associated with poor diet.<sup>i</sup>
- As the need for convenience foods has increased, there has been a population-wide reduction in food literacy.<sup>ii</sup>
- Sources where Western Australians obtain food information: Internet (32.3%); TV programmes (16%); peers or family (15%); magazine articles (15%); TV advertisements (14%); nutrition labels (6%).<sup>iii</sup>
- Low food literacy may contribute to consumption of highly-processed foods.<sup>iv</sup>

### Areas for consideration

#### Food labelling at restaurants

- Please note the Health Star rating system (currently under review), is a Federal policy and is therefore beyond the scope of both this brief and the Forum.
- Use of energy intake information in fast-food and chain-restaurant settings is clearly associated with lower calorie purchases. Special attention should be focused on educating consumers on how to interpret and use nutrition information.<sup>v</sup>
- Food label use and sufficient levels of health literacy predict better dietary quality.<sup>vi</sup>
- In general, traffic light labels are the most frequent categories of labelling used when making food purchasing decisions, including at restaurants.<sup>vii</sup>

#### Vulnerable populations

- Literacy level has a significant effect on a consumers' ability to process and understand the Nutrition Facts panel.
  - Regardless of format, the Nutrition Facts panel was better understood by consumers at higher levels of general literacy.<sup>viii</sup>
  - Consumers with lower levels of literacy appear to benefit from graphic presentations more than respondents with higher levels of literacy.<sup>ix</sup>
- Among the participants of a food literacy program, poorer food literacy behaviours (i.e. planning, management, selection, preparation and cooking) were associated with food insecurity at enrolment. Improving food literacy in food insecure participants could help them coping with this constraint.<sup>x</sup>

#### Advocacy triggers

- Among the participants of a food literacy program, there was no association between food literacy level and socioeconomic status. The participants with the lowest food literacy score had low self-rated cooking skills, poorer dietary behaviours and considered healthy foods as expensive.<sup>xi</sup>

## What works?

### The NSW Menu Labelling Scheme

- 2011 legislation requires chain and fast-food restaurants to display nutrition information at point-of-sale, paired with an informative website and campaign
- 2013 evaluation found a 15% decrease in kilojoules purchased at point-of-sale.<sup>xii</sup>

### Measures to improve food literacy

- There is some evidence that developing adequate cooking skills in adolescence can have long term benefits a decade later, but it is inconclusive.<sup>xiii</sup>
- Consumers with lower levels of literacy appear to benefit from graphic presentations more than those with higher levels of literacy.<sup>xiv</sup>

### Food literacy programmes

- In the Western Australian context, the Food sensations for Adults (FSA) program has demonstrated improvement in:
  - Food literacy behaviours, including in participants who were considered low in food literacy behaviours at enrolment;
  - Self-reported fruit and vegetable intake, fast food meal frequency and sugar-sweetened beverages frequency.<sup>xv</sup>

## What's missing?

### Gaps in knowledge:

- Across the globe, there is a lack of rigour in the way we measure food literacy.<sup>xvi</sup>
- There is little information about the effectiveness of food literacy interventions that impact populations at a state-wide and local-government level.
- There is a general lack of information on measures to improve food literacy for vulnerable populations.

### Gaps in policy:

- South Australia, Victoria, Queensland, Australian Capital Territory and NSW all have mandatory menu labelling schemes.
- The Food Policy Index described advocacy towards food labelling in WA as 'not strong'.<sup>xvii</sup>

## Advocacy triggers

## References

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- <sup>ii</sup> Chronic Disease Prevention Directorate. Western Australian Health Promotion Strategic Framework 2017–2021. Perth: Department of Health, Western Australia; 2017
- <sup>iii</sup> Miller, MR., and Miller, SA. (2017) [Nutrition Monitoring Survey Series 2015 Key Findings](#), Department of Health, Western Australia.
- <sup>iv</sup> Dumanovsky, T., et al. (2011) [Changes in energy content of lunchtime purchases from fast food restaurants after introduction of calorie labelling: cross sectional customer surveys](#) *BMJ*; 343:d4464
- <sup>v</sup> Ibid
- <sup>vi</sup> Cha, E., et al., (2014). [Health literacy, self-efficacy, food label use, and diet in young adults](#). *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 38(3), 331-9
- <sup>vii</sup> Morley, B., et al., (2013) [What types of nutrition menu labelling lead consumers to select less energy-dense fast food? An experimental study](#). Morley B et al., *Appetite*. 67:8-15  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2013.03.003>
- <sup>viii</sup> Viswanathan, M., et al., (2009) [Understanding and Facilitating the Usage of Nutritional Labels by Low-Literacy Consumers](#) *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* Vol 28.2 DOI
- <sup>ix</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>x</sup> Begley, A., et al., (2019) [Examining the Association between Food Literacy and Food Insecurity](#), *Nutrients*, 11:2, 445
- <sup>xi</sup> Begley, A., et al., (2019) [Identifying Participants Who Would Benefit the Most from an Adult Food Literacy Program](#), *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16:7, 1272
- <sup>xii</sup> Obesity Policy Coalition (2018), *Policy Brief: Menu Kilojoule Labelling in Chain Food Outlets in Australia*, accessed from <<http://www.opc.org.au/downloads/policy-briefs/menu-kj-labelling-in-chain-food-outlets-in-australia.pdf>>
- <sup>xiii</sup> Utter, J., et al., (2018) [Self-Perceived Cooking Skills in Emerging Adulthood Predict Better Dietary Behaviours and Intake 10 Years Later: A Longitudinal Study](#) *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behaviour*, 50:5, pp 494-500
- <sup>xiv</sup> Viswanathan, M., et al., (2009) [Understanding and Facilitating the Usage of Nutritional Labels by Low-Literacy Consumers](#) *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* Vol 28.2 DOI
- <sup>xv</sup> Begley, A., et al., (2019) [Effectiveness of an Adult Food Literacy Program](#), *Nutrients*, 11:4, 797
- <sup>xvi</sup> Yuen, E., et al (2018) [Measuring nutrition and food literacy in adults a systematic review and appraisal of existing measurement tools](#) *Health Literacy Research and Practice*. 2:3, e134-e160.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Sacks G, Robinson E for the Food-EPI Australia project team. [Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments: 2019 Progress update, Western Australian Government](#). Melbourne: Deakin University, 2019.

## Advocacy triggers

Media Advocacy | Political Advocacy | Coalition Building | Consensus Statements | Research & Translation | Policy and Regulation | Systems Advocacy