



The Hon Greg Hunt MP  
Minister for Health  
PO Box 6022  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

12<sup>th</sup> November 2019

Dear Minister,

**Re: NHMRC Clinical Practice Guidelines for the management of overweight and obesity in adults, adolescents and children in Australia**

The Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society (ANZOS) was established in 1991 and represents over 300 medical practitioners; dietitians; scientists and other health professionals interested in research, clinical practice and public health initiatives directed at the prevention and management of obesity.

It is our understanding that the 2013 NHMRC Clinical Practice Guidelines for the management of overweight and obesity in adults, adolescents and children in Australia<sup>i</sup> have been rescinded due to their age – being over five years old.

We are concerned that the guidelines have not been updated, particularly given the number of clinicians and patients to whom the guidelines are relevant and the high rates of confusion about managing obesity that exists amongst clinicians.

This issue is of great importance as increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity in Australia represents a significant threat to population health<sup>ii</sup>. In 2017-18, 67% of Australians aged 18 years and over were overweight or obese (12.5 million people), up from 63% in 2014-15<sup>iii</sup>. Early intervention in primary care and community health settings can help avoid later presentations to the health system for obesity related disease.

A 2017 RACGP report found that managing obesity and complications was a major concern of GPs regarding future of primary care (second only to mental health)<sup>iv</sup>.

Research in Australia and internationally consistently finds that a minority of patients are receiving health professional led weight management advice<sup>v,vi,vii</sup> despite most patients wanting such advice<sup>vii,viii,ix</sup>.

Health professionals report that they lack skills as well as time to have effective conversations about weight management with clients<sup>vii,x</sup> and are often unsure where to find evidence based resources<sup>xi</sup> or referral pathways for patients requiring additional support or intervention<sup>xii</sup>.

In contrast, advice to patients from Government and health organisations is to discuss their weight with their GP or other health professional<sup>xiii,xiv,xv,xvi,xvii</sup>.

Up to date evidence based Clinical Guidelines are of great importance to health professionals working in a range of settings. Currently your government is working to develop a National Obesity Strategy, of which treatment and management of obesity would be an important additional element. As part of this up to date national guidelines can provide evidence on obesity management, advice on conducting effective brief interventions,

highlight quality patient resources and advice on points to consider in secondary and tertiary care as well as summarise referral pathways.

We urge the Government to commission the National Health and Medical Research Council to update and release new clinical guidelines for the management of overweight and obesity.

If you would like further information on this important matter, please don't hesitate to contact me by email [Jane.Martin@cancervic.org.au](mailto:Jane.Martin@cancervic.org.au). I look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,



Jane Martin  
President, Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society

<sup>i</sup> National Health and Medical Research Council (2013). Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Management of Overweight and Obesity in Adults, Adolescents and Children in Australia. Melbourne: NHMRC.

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2017) *Impact of overweight and obesity as a risk factor for chronic conditions: Australian Burden of Disease Study*. Australian Burden of Disease Study series no11. Canberra, Australia: AIHW.

<sup>iii</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018) 4364.0.55.001 - *National Health Survey: First Results, 2017-18*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

<sup>iv</sup> The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. General Practice: Health of the Nation. East Melbourne, Vic: RACGP 2017.

<sup>v</sup> Booth, A.O. and Nowson, C.A., 2010. Patient recall of receiving lifestyle advice for overweight and hypertension from their General Practitioner. *BMC Family Practice*, 11(1), p.8.

<sup>vi</sup> Turner, L.R., Harris, M.F. and Mazza, D., 2015. Obesity management in general practice: does current practice match guideline recommendations?. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 202(7), pp.370-372.

<sup>vii</sup> Caterson, I.D., Alfadda, A.A., Auerbach, P., Coutinho, W., Cuevas, A., Dicker, D., Hughes, C., Iwabu, M., Kang, J.H., Nawar, R. and Reynoso, R., 2019. Gaps to bridge: misalignment between perception, reality and actions in obesity. *Diabetes, Obesity and Metabolism*.

<sup>viii</sup> LiveLighter 2017, Shape of Australia national survey found 77% of respondents felt comfortable talking to their health professional about their weight, and 34% turned to their doctor for weight advice (second highest source after 'online').

<sup>ix</sup> Tan, D., Zwar, N.A., Dennis, S.M. and Vagholkar, S., 2006. Weight management in general practice: what do patients want?. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 185(2), pp.73-75.

<sup>x</sup> Campbell, K., Engel, H., Timperio, A., Cooper, C. and Crawford, D., 2000. Obesity management: Australian general practitioners' attitudes and practices. *Obesity Research*, 8(6), pp.459-466.

<sup>xi</sup> Mitchell, L.J., MacDonald-Wicks, L. and Capra, S., 2011. Nutrition advice in general practice: the role of general practitioners and practice nurses. *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, 17(2), pp.202-208.

<sup>xii</sup> King, L.A., Loss, J.H., Wilkenfeld, R.L., Pagnini, D.L., Booth, M.L. and Booth, S.L., 2007. Australian GPs' perceptions about child and adolescent overweight and obesity the Weight of Opinion study. *Br J Gen Pract*, 57(535), pp.124-129.

<sup>xiii</sup> Australian Government, Department of Health, Healthy Weight Guide (accessed 22 July 2019)

[http://healthyweight.health.gov.au/wps/portal/Home/helping-hand/getting%20support/how%20health%20professionals%20can%20help!ut/p/a1/tvFNU8IwEP0ruXDMJI1tE44IDC1je-FgmwsT0rSJQhpoFPn3purJGUQP7m1n3r6PfYijCnErXk0nvOmt2I87T7cWS4jEkf5KI3PcU5ZyYoyIhsao0fEEZFwO69RrZXYe30BZ2U67YHsrVfWT\\_BBGDvBWu2dsR3UwjYT3CnvwwaGF-f6UwDp\\_gw-CYA79a0ahg8LA5DCgvF2VHLSNKhmUdlkUyphKxsK4ybZQZYSBXeUNpFsl5Kku2C9DtboxIznhXyULkPlqlsX0IdzEjOB8cZ8t6LTAOE-AD9I1MEDvSpSxmjzx1DrW65Danlq5kUXalXXONi2R9W3Z6Pq9rMDkXk6Hvks1Dv2-DZe\\_W-7nBgdx43JI5DUb3gFmtV2D/dI5/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/](http://healthyweight.health.gov.au/wps/portal/Home/helping-hand/getting%20support/how%20health%20professionals%20can%20help!ut/p/a1/tvFNU8IwEP0ruXDMJI1tE44IDC1je-FgmwsT0rSJQhpoFPn3purJGUQP7m1n3r6PfYijCnErXk0nvOmt2I87T7cWS4jEkf5KI3PcU5ZyYoyIhsao0fEEZFwO69RrZXYe30BZ2U67YHsrVfWT_BBGDvBWu2dsR3UwjYT3CnvwwaGF-f6UwDp_gw-CYA79a0ahg8LA5DCgvF2VHLSNKhmUdlkUyphKxsK4ybZQZYSBXeUNpFsl5Kku2C9DtboxIznhXyULkPlqlsX0IdzEjOB8cZ8t6LTAOE-AD9I1MEDvSpSxmjzx1DrW65Danlq5kUXalXXONi2R9W3Z6Pq9rMDkXk6Hvks1Dv2-DZe_W-7nBgdx43JI5DUb3gFmtV2D/dI5/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/)

<sup>xiv</sup> Better Health Channel, Victorian Government (accessed 22 July 2019)

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/weight-management-services>

<sup>xv</sup> Health Direct Website (accessed 22 July, 2019) <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/childhood-obesity-and-overweight-children>

<sup>xvi</sup> LiveLighter Campaign (accessed 22 July 2019) <https://livelighter.com.au/The-Facts/Information-for-Parents/>

<sup>xvii</sup> The Heart Foundation (accessed 22 July 2019) <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/know-your-risks/healthy-weight>