



## AUSTRALIAN CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION ALLIANCE



18 November 2019

### Health Star Rating five year review - Joint statement of public health and consumer groups

Leading public health and consumer groups welcome the outcomes of the Ministerial Forum as an important step in concluding the Health Star Rating (HSR) System [Five Year Review](#). Health Stars are one of the key ways to ensure Australians can navigate supermarket shelves for the healthiest option. This is also a key measure to combat Australia's escalating obesity rates and reduce diet-related death and disability.

Research suggests the system is performing well overall, and that the majority of people understand and like the Health Star system logo. [Results of a new survey](#) released last week by CHOICE show that 75 percent of Aussie shoppers use the ratings system to make informed buying decisions.

Public health and consumer groups remain concerned about the food industry's influence on the development and implementation of Health Stars, which is preventing the system from reaching its full potential as an important tool to help improve the health of all Australians. Available details from Friday's [Forum Communique](#) highlight a number of enhancements endorsed by Ministers, which promise to make Health Stars work better for consumers.

### Support for the majority of the Review Recommendations

- We welcome Ministerial recognition that Health Stars should be continued. We look forward to the development of a further plan for continued implementation, including detail of the funding and infrastructure necessary to support the system.
- We particularly welcome improvements to Health Star governance. These include an increasing role for Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). Further detail in this area could usefully clarify the role of industry as a partner in implementation, but we maintain that industry should not set the terms of health policy.

### Changes to the way Health Stars are calculated

- We have long advocated for improvements to the HSR algorithm, which is used to calculate a product's HSR. It needs to be improved in order to prevent some products high in salt, sugar and fat from scoring too highly.

*Please note that input from the Heart Foundation to the Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (ACDPA) position on the HSR system has been limited to feedback on technical aspects of the system.*

- We're pleased to see a commitment to improving the way the ratings are calculated, and in particular we hope to see this translate into stronger treatment of salt and sugar. We believe the treatment of sugars would be improved by incorporating added sugars into the Health Star Rating algorithm. Ministers have already agreed that this information should be quantified in the Nutrient Information Panel on back-of-pack. We'd like to see a commitment that it be included in the algorithm too. If this is not yet practically possible, stronger treatment of total sugars in the review is necessary to stop sugary foods scoring too highly.
- We welcome further modelling of sodium options to address large numbers of salty snacks and processed meats that score highly despite these being categorised as food 'to limit' in the Australian Dietary Guidelines. It is simply not acceptable that many potato chips can score 4.0 stars.
- We are encouraged that additional modelling will be led by government and independent experts. This is consistent with new World Health Organization best-practice guidance that product scoring needs to remain free of commercially conflicted interests.

### **Moving towards mandatory**

We strongly believe that in order for the HSR system to be truly effective, the system must be made mandatory. We're calling on Ministers to ensure that manufacturers display Health Stars on *all* products, not just products that score highly. Five years on, HSR is still only displayed on a [third of eligible products](#), mostly those that have higher scores.

This figure is likely to go down after the review if the proposal to remove the non-interpretive 'energy icon' is confirmed. The icon has been used unevenly in the drinks and confectionery categories to avoid showing consumers full 'star' ratings.

Ministers agreed that the system will remain voluntary for now, but have also committed to adopting interim targets. The implementation plan must ensure these targets are specific, measurable, and will trigger Stars being automatically mandated by a given date if not met.

At least ten countries now have mandatory front-of-pack labels, consumers in Australia and New Zealand deserve the same.

We look forward to the release of the government's full Response to the Review in the coming weeks, and to the development of an implementation plan that makes sure Health Stars work for consumers, not just food companies.