

28 May 2024

Members of the Food Ministers' Meeting
C/O Food Regulation Secretariat
Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care
Via email: FoodRegulationSecretariat@health.gov.au

Dear Ministers

Preparing for the future of the Health Star Rating (HSR) System

I write to express our support for Food Ministers' steps towards mandating the display of the Health Star Rating (HSR) system, as reported in the communiqué 3 May 2024 meeting.

Public health and consumer groups remain supporters of the HSR system as part of a suite of evidence-informed measures to improve population diets. We share Food Ministers' disappointment at the results of the government's uptake monitoring, which confirms low levels of voluntary uptake similar to those independently reported by The George Institute in Australia and the University of Auckland in New Zealand (36% and 30%, respectively). Findings from the government's industry survey also indicate little intent from the food industry to increase the availability of the HSR system voluntarily.

We consider there is now no prospect of the food industry meeting the voluntary 2024 (60%) and 2025 (70%) uptake targets. Application of the HSR system also continues to be skewed towards high scoring healthier products while omitting this information from unhealthy options, suggesting it is being applied primarily for marketing purposes. Mandating the display of the HSR system is necessary to fulfill its intent to enable consumers to compare between products and choose healthier options.

After a decade of inadequate industry action, we applaud Ministers for starting their consideration of stronger action now. This will facilitate the preparatory work to support a decision on mandating the system being made as soon as feasible. We understand that officials have been directed to prepare initial options for Ministers' consideration at the July 2024 Food Ministers' Meeting. Public health and consumer stakeholders stand ready and available to support Ministers and officials in their efforts to mandate and strengthen the HSR system to retain consumer trust and achieve its public health goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'B. Neal', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Prof Bruce Neal MB ChB, PhD, FRCP, FAHA, FAHMS
Executive Director
The George Institute for Global Health, Australia

Supported by the organisations listed below:



Rosemary Stanton

Dr Rosemary Stanton OAM
Independent Public Health Nutritionist

