



## **MEDIA RELEASE - 4 JULY 2007**

### **CALL FOR GOVERNMENT TO STAY STAUNCH IN FACE OF "HARDBALL" JUNK FOOD INDUSTRY**

The director of the Public Health Association, Gay Keating, has called on the government to remain steadfast in dealing with the junk food industry, particularly when it offers to regulate itself.

Dr Keating was speaking to the Public Health Association annual conference at Auckland University, telling the public health delegates that the junk food industry has learned the lessons of marketers of products such as alcohol, tobacco and gambling.

"These products and activities are addictive. Once people are into them in a big way, it's hard to quit. High sugar junk food has a similar effect with a sugar high followed by a sugar crash that needs more sugar to bring you round again."

"But there are also common techniques these industries employ to trigger and maintain demand for their products. One is to "get them young and get them early" so marketing of alcohol and tobacco, for instance, often targets 14 year olds, even when it seems to be aimed at adults. The underlying idea is that what looks like adult fun is attractive to adolescents.

"Secondly, marketing seeks to "normalise" the product. Gambling is often linked to sport which is part of normal family fun. Alcohol advertising presents drinking as being part of normal adult life, and lately, even excess drinking is being advertised as an ordinary fun thing."

Dr Keating told the conference another tool used by the gambling, tobacco and alcohol industries is the offer to self regulate. "But it's now realised these industries cannot be trusted to do that effectively. The same applies to the food industry. Moves to adjust television advertising of food aimed at young children are woefully inadequate. Young people need mandatory protection to ensure they don't adopt the insidious message that treat food is part of an everyday diet. Otherwise, they are staring at an adult life of obesity, diabetes and other related diseases."

Gay Keating also said that to counter criticism of their product, marketers will often confuse consumers by relentlessly maintaining that the “scientific community is divided” over the effects of using their product. Industries do this in the face of overwhelming scientific consensus over the damage a product can do.

Dr Keating said there had been the stirrings of a public health response to such manoeuvres and some restrictions had been applied but she warned the junk food industry, like others of its ilk, plays hard ball to keep up demand for its product.

“The government needs to act equally zealously. The government should not give in to food industry offers of voluntary codes. They are ineffective, which is what the industries intend. And the government must act decisively to short circuit the pernicious message to young New Zealanders that junk food is okay to eat regularly.”

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