

OVERVIEW OF THE IOM REPORT ON *FOOD MARKETING TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH: THREAT OR OPPORTUNITY?*

Through a congressional directive, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) requested that the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies conduct a study to review the influence of food marketing on the diets and health of children and youth in the United States. *Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?* explores what is known about current food and beverage marketing practices, the influence of these practices on the diets and health of children and youth, and public and private strategies that can be used to promote healthful food and beverage choices in children and youth. The report was prepared by an Institute of Medicine (IOM) committee, chaired by Dr. J. Michael McGinnis, that brought 16 experts in the areas of nutrition; child and adolescent development; psychology; media and advertising; consumer marketing and behavior; social marketing; evaluation; education; public health and policy; food, beverage, and entertainment industries; constitutional law; and business ethics.

Dietary Patterns of Children and Youth

The diets of America's children and adolescents depart substantially from recommendations and reflect a pattern that puts their health at risk. Overall, children and youth are not achieving basic nutritional goals. They are consuming excessive calories and exceed recommended intakes of total fat, saturated fats, added sugars, and sodium. The report reveals that the dietary and health-related patterns of children and youth are influenced by the interplay of many factors, including genetics and biology, culture and values, economic status, physical and social environments, and commercial and media environments. Among these environments, the media, in its multiple forms and broad reach, plays a central socializing role for young people and is an important channel for promoting branded food and beverage products in the marketplace.

KEY FACTS

- There is strong evidence that marketing of foods and beverages to children influences their preferences, requests, purchases, and diets.
- The dominant focus of marketing to children and youth is on foods and beverages high in calories and low in nutrients, and is sharply out of balance with healthful diets.
- Marketing approaches have become multi-faceted and sophisticated, moving far beyond television advertising to include the Internet, advergames, strategic product placement across media, and much more.
- Turning around the current trends will require broad private and public leadership—including the full participation of the food, beverage, and restaurant industries, food retailers, trade associations, advertising and marketing industry, entertainment industry and the media—in cooperation with parents, schools, and government agencies.
- Given the media and marketing environment that envelops our children's lives, there is a surprising paucity of available research on either the effects or the ways they may be used to promote health.

Parents, Caregivers, and Families

- To support parents, caregivers, and families in promoting healthful diets for children and youth, the government, in partnership with the private sector, should create a long-term, multi-faceted, and financially-sustained social marketing program that should:
 - Include a full range of evolving and integrated marketing tools with widespread educational and community-based efforts.
 - Target parents of children from birth to the age of four years to build wise selection skills for healthful and affordable food and beverage choices for their children.
 - Offer a reliable support stream that should be in place for social marketing programs through public-appropriated funds and counterpart cooperative support from the businesses that market foods and beverages to children and youth.

Schools

- State and local educational authorities, with support from parents, health authorities, and other stakeholders, should educate about and promote healthful diets for children and youth in all aspects of the school environment (e.g., commercial sponsorships, meals and snacks, curriculum). To achieve this, it should:
 - Develop and implement nutrition standards for all competitive foods and beverages sold or served in the school environment.
 - Adopt policies and best practices that promote the availability and marketing of foods and beverages that support healthful diets.

- Provide visible leadership in this effort by public and civic leaders at all levels such as the National Governors Association, the State and Local Boards of Education and the Parents Teachers Organization, as well as trade associations representing private-sector businesses such as distributors, bottlers, and vending machine companies that directly interface with the school administration.

Government

- Government, in partnership with the private sector, should create a long-term, multi-faceted social marketing program targeting parents, caregivers, and families to promote healthful diets for children and youth (see above recommendation).
- Government at all levels should marshal the full range of public policy approaches (e.g., subsidies, taxes, legislation, regulation, federal nutrition programs) to foster the development and promotion of healthful diets for children and youth.
- If voluntary efforts related to advertising during children's television programming are unsuccessful in shifting the emphasis away from high-calorie and low-nutrient foods and beverages to the advertising of healthful foods and beverages, Congress should enact legislation mandating the shift on both broadcast and cable television.
- The nation's formidable research capacity should be better directed to sustained, multidisciplinary work on how marketing influences the food and beverage choices of children and youth.
- The Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services should designate a responsible agency, with adequate and appropriate resources, to formally monitor and report regularly on the progress of the various entities and activities related to the recommendations included in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A Multi-Faceted Approach to Improve the Diet-Related Health of Children and Youth

This report presents recommendations for different segments of society to guide the development of effective marketing strategies that promote healthier food, beverage, and meal options to children and youth. Recommendations are also offered for research necessary to chart the path of future improvements, and the capacity to monitor and track improvements in marketing practices that have an influence on children's and youth's diets and diet-related health. These recommendations reflect the current context and information in a rapidly changing environment, and should be implemented together as a package to support and complement one another.

Food, Beverage, and Restaurant Industries

- The food, beverage, and restaurant industries should use their creativity, resources, and full range of marketing practices to promote and support more healthful diets for children and youth. To achieve this, the industries should:
 - Shift their product portfolios in a direction that promotes new and re-formulated child- and youth-oriented foods and beverages that are substantially lower in total calories, lower in fats, salt, and added sugars, and higher in nutrient content.
 - Shift their advertising and marketing emphasis to child- and youth-oriented foods and beverages that are substantially lower in total calories, lower in fats, salt, and added sugars and higher in nutrient content.

- Restaurants should expand and actively promote healthier food, beverage, and meal options for children and youth and provide calorie content and key nutrition information on menus and packaging that is prominently visible at the point of choice and use.
- Engage the full range of their marketing vehicles and venues to develop and promote healthier, appealing, and affordable foods and beverages for children and youth.

Advertising, Marketing, Entertainment Industry, and Media

- The food, beverage, restaurant, entertainment, and marketing industries should work with government, scientific, public health, and consumer groups to establish and enforce the highest standards for the marketing of foods, beverages, and meals to children and youth. To achieve this, it should:
 - Work through the Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU) to revise, expand, enforce, and evaluate explicit industry self-regulatory guidelines beyond traditional advertising to include evolving vehicles and venues for marketing communications.
 - Assure that licensed characters are used only to promote foods and beverages that support healthful diets for children and youth.
- The media and entertainment industry should direct its extensive power to promote healthful foods and beverages for children and youth. To do so, it should:
 - Incorporate into the multiple media platforms (e.g., print, broadcast, cable, the Internet, and wireless-based programming) foods, beverages, and storylines that promote healthful diets.
 - Strengthen their capacity to serve as accurate interpreters and reporters to the public on findings, claims, and practices related to the diets of children and youth.

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not achieving basic nutritional goals. They are consuming excessive calories and exceed recommended intakes of total fat, saturated fats, added sugars, and sodium. The report reveals that the dietary and health-related patterns of children and youth are influenced by the interplay of many factors, including genetics and biology, culture and values, economic status, physical and social environments, and commercial and media environments. Among these environments, the media, in its multiple forms and broad reach, plays a central socializing role for young people and is an important channel for promoting branded food and beverage products in the marketplace.

Dietary Patterns of Children and Youth

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MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

- Along with many other intersecting factors, food and beverage marketing influences the diets and health prospects of children and youth.
- Food and beverage marketing practices, geared to children and youth, are out of balance with recommended healthful diets, and contribute to an environment that puts their health at risk.
- Food and beverage companies, restaurants, and marketers have underutilized the potential to devote creativity and resources in promoting food, beverages, and meals that support healthful diets for children and youth.
- Achieving healthful diets for children and youth will require continued, multi-sectoral, and integrated efforts that include industry leadership and initiative.
- Public policy programs and incentives do not currently have the support or authority to address many of the current and emerging marketing practices that influence the diets of children and youth.