



Australian Government
Office for Youth

body image

information paper

This paper provides information to support the Australian Government's consultation on a National Strategy on Body Image that is being conducted online between 6 May– 5 June 2009.

You can participate in the Body Image Consultation at www.youth.gov.au/bodyimage

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Body image relates to how people think and feel about their own body.

The most commonly thought of factor when talking about body image, for males and females, is a person's size and shape. However, there are other appearance related factors that might also be considered as having the ability to affect how people feel about and value their bodies.¹ For example:

- ethnic diversity and skin colour
- religious diversity, especially where a religion is associated with a specific appearance
- people with physical disabilities, including people who use wheel chairs, prosthetics or other aids.
- having a natural skin colour, that is, skin that is not tanned

Negative Body Image occurs when individuals develop negative feelings about their body and these feelings impact on their general wellbeing to the extent that they can become a contributing factor in the development of serious psychological and physical concerns, including eating disorders, depression and anxiety disorders, self-harm and social isolation.

The Australian Government has established a National Body Image Advisory Group whose Terms of Reference are primarily focussed on the development of a National Strategy and Industry Code of Conduct to help identify and address the issues and causes of negative body image.

WHAT DOES BODY IMAGE INCLUDE?

Body image
relates to how
people think
and feel about
their own body.

Introduction

This Information Paper is divided into three sections that provide information on different topics. These are:

PART ONE

an evidence base.

The first part of this paper aims to build a solid argument to encourage action from industry and other stakeholders on the issue of body image.

PART TWO

bringing about change: examples of interventions.

The second part of the paper outlines a range of interventions that address body image. It builds on the research into some of the causes of negative body image introduced in Part one.

PART THREE

examples of related Australian Government initiatives.

The third part of the paper demonstrates that any responses to address body image will not be introduced in a policy vacuum. There are a range of current Government initiatives that could provide a framework to support the introduction of measures specific to body image.

Purpose

The intent of the first part of this Information Paper is to provide a balanced view of the research and provide a solid evidence base for action. It will show that:

- the ideal body image espoused by our current culture is one of thinness for females and a lean but muscular body for males
- there is wide acceptance of our current cultural ideal of beauty and body image. This means that people are under a lot of pressure from multiple sources to conform to these standards. This is associated with a very high rate of body dissatisfaction in our society, especially among adolescents who are particularly vulnerable to this pressure
- in addition to the direct effects body dissatisfaction can have on a person's wellbeing, body dissatisfaction can also be a factor in the development of other health conditions that significantly impair young people's wellbeing and healthy functioning. These conditions can include poor self-esteem, negative mood, obesity, social isolation, clinical depression and eating disorders.
- some individual characteristics tend to mean that some people are more likely to accept and take on cultural ideals of beauty. These people are more likely to compare themselves with these ideals and feel dissatisfied with themselves and their bodies
- within the broad cultural framework of body image and beauty, significant others such as parents, friends and peers can have a significant impact on how people feel about themselves and their bodies
- the media, advertising and fashion industries play a contributory role in developing a cultural view about what is considered beautiful and what type of body image is the most desirable.

PART ONE AN EVIDENCE BASE

What is the body image problem?

Body image relates to how a person thinks and feels about their own body. Body image problems arise when the thoughts and feelings that people have about their body's impact on their wellbeing and lead to unhealthy behaviours.

The problem is cultural

This paper argues that body image problems are primarily rooted in a cultural ideal of beauty.

There is a significant amount of research showing that our current culture has arrived at an ideal of beauty that is harmful to the physical and psychological wellbeing of many people, particularly adolescents. ^{2,3,4}

This ideal has a number of unintended consequences, including that it can lead people to feel negatively about themselves, generally lessen people's wellbeing and can serve as a contributing factor to serious health issues.

While, there will always be a general idea about what a culture considers to be beautiful, it is concerning that our current culture's ideal of beauty is largely unrealistic, unattainable and increasingly achievable only through digital enhancement.

Through the proliferation of the mass media, which has accompanied advances in technology it is becoming harder and harder to recognise that many of these messages are manufactured and unhealthy.

For women the current cultural ideal is thinness, with many experts talking about a 'thin ideal'. The drive for thinness often comes at the expense of healthy behaviours and can result in the introduction of actively unhealthy behaviours.⁵ While the research is less extensive for men, the cultural ideal tends to be a body that is not overly large or skinny, with some researchers talking about a lean but muscular upper body.⁶ In practice, this means that most adolescent women with body dissatisfaction tend to be focused on losing weight, while adolescent males tend to adopt strategies that are concerned with either losing weight or gaining a more muscular body. ^{7,8,9}

Body image **problems** arise when the thoughts and feelings that people have about their bodies impact on their wellbeing and lead to unhealthy behaviours.

The problem is rooted in a person's dissatisfaction with their own body

Research tells us that we should not be surprised by the negative impacts associated with having a poor body image. People's sense of their physical self is very much tied to their overall feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. So when people hear and accept the message that they are not beautiful enough, and they continue to receive this message from a range of sources and over an extended period of time, it is not surprising that they experience a lack of satisfaction with their own appearance and a drop in self-esteem.¹⁰ This personal and individual lack of satisfaction with one's own body is at the heart of the body image issue and has led to researchers using the term 'body dissatisfaction' to describe someone who has a negative or poor body image.

It is a problem that affects young people

Young people are concerned about the pressure they are facing to have the perfect body. Their concern is not just about the pressure they themselves feel, but also how this pressure affects others around them. Young people are seeing their friends and family undergo personal and painful experiences associated with having a negative view of their own body image.^{11,12}

What are the most important things that need to change to improve wellbeing for young people in Australia?

"stop promoting images in media that make young people believe their physical appearance isn't good enough" **Minjee, Sixteen**¹³

Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to body dissatisfaction due to the physiological, social and psychological changes they are going through.^{14,15} Research has suggested that these changes make young people more likely to seek out external sources, such as those presented by the mass media, to give them a reference point and help them deal with issues associated with their changing bodies and identities, including making determinations about what characteristics are desirable or undesirable.¹⁶

Of growing concern is the decreasing age of young people when they start to pick up on messages which are likely to lead to body dissatisfaction. Children as young as five and six years are more likely to be aware of dieting and have concerns over their body shape if they watch music television shows and looked at appearance-focused magazines, particularly magazines targeted at an adult audience.¹⁷

What are the causes of body dissatisfaction?

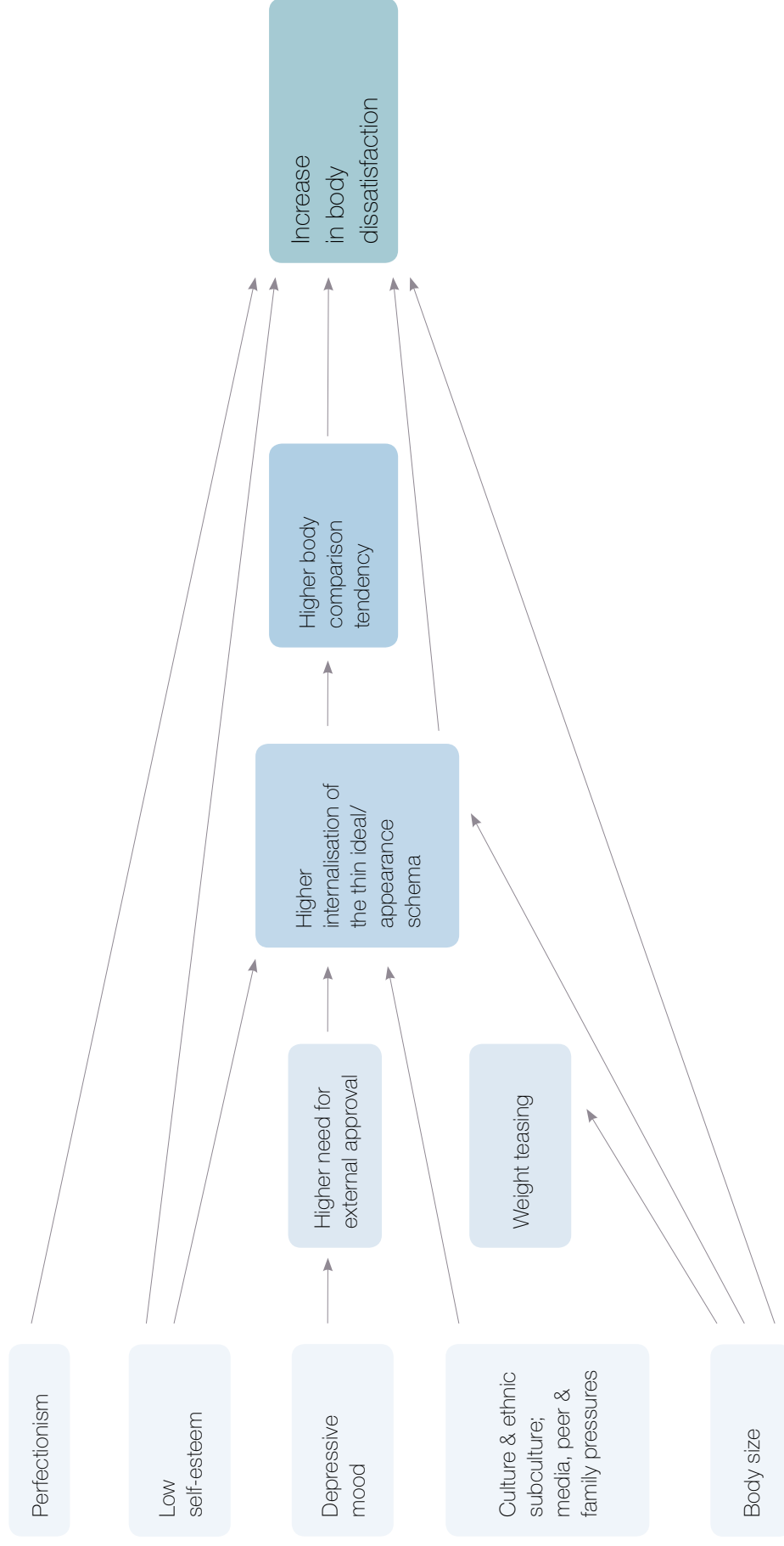
Most experts and academics explain the causes of body dissatisfaction through a mix of social and cultural influences, referred to as sociocultural theory. This theory recognises the complex interactions between a range of different factors that can combine to cause body dissatisfaction in some people. Sociocultural theory suggests that messages about body image are transmitted through parents and other key people in a person's life, including friends and peers and the media. These messages do not affect everybody equally, but are more likely to resonate with people who have certain personal characteristics.^{18,19,20}

The key factors in the development of body dissatisfaction can be grouped into three categories:

1. cultural messages, generally communicated through the mass media
2. social messages, such as those given by people in an individual's immediate social environment
3. personal characteristics of the individual.

While each of these categories are discussed separately below, they do not work in isolation. The following model illustrates one way in which these types of factors can interact to contribute to the development of body dissatisfaction.

A synthesised model of factors contributing to the development of body dissatisfaction²¹



Cultural messages given by industry

NOTE. While there are cultural ideals of beauty for male and females, research has tended to focus on the impact this has on females rather than males. More research is needed before these same links can be drawn between males and the mass media. This is not to say that the media does not have an effect on males and their thoughts about their bodies. Qualitative research suggests that some men believe that male bodies in the media are represented in an unrealistic manner and this impacts their view of themselves and other men.²²

Cultural messages and the mass media help to determine what type of physical features are considered beautiful and desirable in our society. Some researchers suggest that mass media, in particular, is one of the most powerful sources of sociocultural ideals of body image.^{23,24} The messages given by the mass media clearly support an ideal body image that is thin, rather than healthy.*

Researchers have explored the impact of looking at ideal body shapes throughout the media through a range of different mediums,²⁵ including music videos,²⁶ magazine advertisements²⁷ and appearance focussed television programs.^{28,29} The majority of these studies suggest that exposing young people to ideal images of beauty can lead to increases in body dissatisfaction. The research also suggests that the extent of the impact can depend on the personal characteristics of the individual and the way in which other people in their immediate social environment support these ideals. These personal characteristics and social influences are discussed below.

While many advertisers market products in an ethical manner, a key role of the advertiser is to create a demand for their product. The Victorian Government's Media Code of Conduct on Body Image Working Group explained how this can relate to body dissatisfaction:

*'advertising often works by making us feel unhappy with our lives, anxious and dissatisfied. The messages are that you are not OK unless you buy this, wear that brand, wash your hair with, and look like that very slim model. It attacks our self esteem.'*³⁰

* 'The media—magazines, TV, films, advertising, music videos—not only emphasize that female self-worth should be based on appearance, but present a powerful cultural ideal of female beauty that is becoming increasingly unattainable (Richins, 1991; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986). For example, a recent content analysis of TV sit-coms found that 76% of female characters were below average weight (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000). The body size of women in the media is often more than 20% underweight (Spitzer, Henderson, & Zivian, 1999)—exceeding a diagnostic criterion for anorexia nervosa of 15% underweight (DSM-IV-TR: American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Airbrushing, digital alteration, and cosmetic surgery further increase the unrealistic nature of media images of women as standards for self-evaluation (Thompson et al., 1999).' Daniel Clay, Vivian L. Vignoles, and Helga Dittmar, Body Image and Self-Esteem Among Adolescent Girls: Testing the Influence of Sociocultural Factors, *Journal of Research on Adolescence* Vol 15(4), pp 451–477

When advertisements create a need to purchase a product by using an ideal and digitally perfected body image, they not only market a product, they also perpetuate the ideal of beauty that is represented by the image. They are, in effect, telling us what we should aspire to.

The fashion industry is commonly identified as the leading cultural authority on what is fashionable and beautiful, what looks and colours are 'in' and what are 'out'. And while the fashion industry is built upon change and trends, there has been a consistent tendency within the industry to use female models that are skinnier than the average person.³¹ Similarly, media ideals increasingly emphasize the importance of appearance and beauty of male models, rather than performance-related attributes.³²

In summary, there is sufficient and consistent research to confidently say that cultural ideals portrayed and promoted by the mass media, advertising and fashion industries play an important role in the development of body dissatisfaction, particularly among females.³³ However, the research findings are not universally consistent in demonstrating causal links. Rather than playing a direct role, it may be that the messages and picture of beauty created by the media, fashion and advertising industries act as a background to more influential messages that are given to people by their friends and family.³⁴

Common sense also tells us that not all young consumers of mass media develop body dissatisfaction, and this suggests that there are other important factors that need consideration.

For more information on the links between the mass media and body dissatisfaction, you can read the Body Image Research Summary, Relationship between Females' Body Image and the Mass Media by visiting the Victorian Government's Office for Youth Website: www.youth.vic.gov.au/Web21/ofy/dvcofy.nsf/allDocs/RWP70EF202BB4AC257CCA257296001C40A7?OpenDocument³⁵

Social messages in an individual's immediate social environment

Most people [seem to think] that the media plays a role in creating the stereotypical image of what is beautiful, but isn't the media just a reflection of society? I think that in order for Australian youth to develop healthy body images, change has to start at the grassroots levels.

Submitted to the Australian Youth Forum discussion board on 25/10/2008 by **Anna**

The social messages that are given to an individual by people who are in their immediate social environment, including their parents, siblings, friends, peers and teachers, can have a significant impact on a person's body dissatisfaction. Importantly, these messages, particularly those given by parents, can either add to or protect against body dissatisfaction.³⁶

It can, however, be difficult for people to send positive messages about body image in the midst of our current cultural environment. Body image messages can be given through subtle modelling behaviours as well as direct criticisms about weight or build.³⁷ For example, children might see their parents or friends engaging in unhealthy or fad dieting, making negative comments about their own weight or appearance, teasing or making jokes about people who are overweight, or talking about celebrities or models in a way that glorifies overly skinny bodies. It is not unusual for a parent to comment on their need to lose weight, or how they are not satisfied with their appearance when pulling on a pair of jeans. Researchers use the term 'appearance conversations' to describe discussions that people have about their dissatisfaction with how they look.³⁸ These types of behaviours can all increase the pressure on young people to conform to body image ideals and can lead to increases in their levels of body dissatisfaction.

Personal characteristics of the individual

The third group of factors that have been shown to play a role in body dissatisfaction are personal characteristics. There are a wide range of personal factors that can leave people more susceptible to developing body dissatisfaction, including:

- people who take on board external standards of beauty and body image and judge themselves by these standards ³⁹
- people who strive for perfectionism ⁴⁰
- people who have a tendency to view themselves 'from the outside', or as they think other people view them ⁴¹
- people who have a tendency to compare themselves with others ⁴²
- a person's age—while the experiences of younger children have shown to be related to the development of body dissatisfaction, adolescents are likely to be most significantly affected by their body image ⁴³
- a person's body mass index and weight—the further a person is from the ideal body image, the more likely they are to develop body dissatisfaction. However, this can be complicated by the distortions that many young women have of their own weight, with many thinking they are overweight, when they are not ^{44,45}
- a person's gender—adolescent females tend to be more likely to develop body dissatisfaction than adolescent boys.⁴⁶ Girls are also more likely to internalise external standards and feel pressure to conform to an idealised body image ⁴⁷
- cultural factors—these can also express themselves in individuals. Different cultures have different body image ideals and this can lead people to be more accepting, and even encouraging, of different types of figures.

The need for action—prevalence and effects of body dissatisfaction

The questions remain about just how much of a problem body image really is and how serious is it. The following responds to these types of questions by providing information on the:

1. prevalence of body dissatisfaction
2. direct impact of body dissatisfaction on a person's general wellbeing
3. association between body dissatisfaction with serious mental health conditions.

Prevalence of body dissatisfaction

Body image ideals are so deeply ingrained in our culture that some researchers talk about it being normal for people to have a certain level of body dissatisfaction.⁴⁸

*'One of the most remarkable and consistent research findings is the overwhelming prevalence of weight and shape-related concerns among adolescents.'*⁴⁹

In fact, there is enough evidence to suggest that body dissatisfaction is approaching epidemic proportions:

Females

- Between 70–76% of Australian high school girls consistently choose an ideal figure that they wish to have that is thinner than their own.
- Over 50% Australian high school girls have tried to lose weight. Only 16% of young women are happy with their body weight.
- Of healthy weight Australian women, 47% believe they are overweight.
- At least 20% of women who are underweight think that they are overweight and are dieting.
- Less than 25% of Australian women are satisfied with their weight.

Males

- In one study of adolescent boys, a third wished to be thinner while over a third wanted to be larger.
- 24% of healthy weight men believe they are overweight.
- At any one time 17% of men are on some sort of diet.⁵⁰

When discussing the prevalence of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders it is important to consider the likelihood that males are under-represented in the statistics. It is argued that eating disorders and body image concerns have traditionally been seen as feminine issues and this means men are less likely to ask for help about these issues.⁵¹

The impact of body dissatisfaction on a person's general wellbeing

Body image dissatisfaction is directly related to how people feel about themselves and this can impact their ability to engage in the community, pursue healthy behaviours and otherwise reach their potential.

Body image delves deeper than the usual bad hair day and the nonexistent summer tan, it is an emotional state, an individual sees themselves as an object of criticism. It's a state that cripples the society, but is battled by the individual.

Submitted to the Australian Youth Forum discussion board on 27/10/2008 by 'moonlit'

Body dissatisfaction has been shown to be directly related to declining self-esteem among girls, negative mood and mood disturbances.

Body dissatisfaction has been shown to be directly related to declining self-esteem among girls, negative mood and mood disturbances.⁵² Some studies have also shown that body dissatisfaction can actually predict depressive symptoms.^{53,54} People in a depressed mood are more likely to focus on negative information that surrounds them and this means they are more likely to make negative comparisons between their own body and what they perceive to be an ideal body.⁵⁵

Obesity is another health-related factor that has been shown to have strong linkages to body dissatisfaction.⁵⁶ Body dissatisfaction can influence health and well-being through its association with unhealthy weight loss practices and associated weight gain. People who believe they are over an ideal weight, whether they are or not, frequently turn to unhealthy weight loss practices as a means of trying to achieve their ideal. Although healthy eating patterns can lead to healthy weight loss in people who are overweight, many people use unhealthy weight loss strategies in an attempt to improve their self-esteem and mood. However, unhealthy weight loss behaviours are associated with negative mood and unhealthy weight gain.⁵⁷

Body dissatisfaction and other serious mental health conditions

The development of mental health conditions, including clinical depression, anxiety and eating disorders such as Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa, generally involves complex interactions among a range of factors that express themselves in ways that are unique to an individual.⁵⁸ In this context, it is not the intention to overly simplify these causes or to lay blame at the feet of any particular cause. However, there is a significant amount of research that suggests body dissatisfaction plays a crucial role in the development of some serious mental health conditions that significantly impair the lives of many people and can even result in early death.⁵⁹ The consistency of this research has led to a widespread acceptance among experts that body dissatisfaction is a key risk factor in the development of eating disorders and depression.^{60,61,62}

- One in ten people diagnosed with anorexia are now male and recent research indicates that this figure is an underestimation.
- Based on 2001 Australian research, 62% of adolescent girls who are classified as extreme dieters are depressed.
- This same research identified that young adult women who diet frequently are 50% more likely to be depressed than those who do not diet.
- In adolescent girls, extreme dieters are 18 times more likely to develop symptoms of eating disorders than non-dieters.
- At any one time, 8% of 15 year old females are on a diet, and of these, 8% are dieting severely.
- Eating disorders affect about 5% of the female population in Australia.
- Anorexia nervosa is the third most common chronic illness for teenage girls in Australia. The average time that someone suffers from anorexia is five years.⁶³

Sometimes statistics and factual information can detract from the emotional and personal nature of the difficulties that people face in life. The challenges that are associated with body dissatisfaction, particularly the struggles of people who live with eating disorders and depression, are very real and heartbreaking. If you would like to gain a more personal understanding of what it is like to live with these conditions, you might like to read people's individual stories that have been posted on the following sites:

www.geocities.com/edpetition/stories_on_anorexia.html

www.eating.ucdavis.edu/speaking/told/told.html

www.eatingdisorders.org.au/content/category/14/65/39/

Please note these stories have not been solicited for the purpose of including in this paper and were found through a simple internet search. The Australian Government does not control or take any responsibility for the information on these sites.

The role of Government

'Government can and should be animated by a vision ... we must be unashamedly arguing for the policies that will make a difference and build a better Australia in twenty, thirty and forty years ... We should be the builders of a better tomorrow.'

Julia Gillard MP, Member for Lalor and then Shadow Spokesperson for Health, 23 August 2005.⁶⁴

As noted previously, the current cultural ideals tend to be more unhealthy than, for example, the curvy images of beauty that were associated with females in previous generations. Combined with this are technological advances that have resulted in a greater distribution of images which reinforce these ideals. Is there a role for Government to influence culture in this context?

In reviewing the results of their National Survey of Young Australians 2007, Mission Australia stated *'The level of concern regarding body image, including for both genders and across all age groups, highlights the need for multi-layered responses and the involvement of many organisations and individuals, including families, schools, governments, community organisations and the advertising and media industries.'*⁶⁵

Government has a role to play in addressing the harm caused by body dissatisfaction as part of creating a healthier and happier society. But, because we live in a society that values freedom of speech, business enterprise, creativity and diverse opinions, it is not as simple as imposing a different cultural ideal of beauty, restricting certain types of images or making it illegal to participate in unhealthy behaviours. Government interventions need to be mindful of, and walk the line between, the need for freedom of creative expression in, for example, fashion magazines, the need for advertisers to create a demand for their products, and the need to provide a society which supports, equips and empowers young people to reach their full potential.

PART TWO BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE: EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS

we **must** be unashamedly arguing for the policies that will make a difference and build a better Australia in twenty, thirty and forty years...

What works?

Body image is a personal and sensitive psychological topic that impacts different people in different ways. Interventions that are not thought through, based on sound evidence, or delivered with care and professionalism may actually increase a person's awareness of their body weight and end up heightening their negative perceptions of their own body. Government in particular has a responsibility to ensure that interventions do not cause further harm.

It is difficult to find concrete evidence on body image interventions that demonstrate real success. This tends to be because interventions in this area take the form of preliminary trials, do not have a rigorous evaluation process or have shown mixed results. However, this does not mean there are no lessons to be learnt, only that there is danger in looking to individual interventions as a 'silver bullet'.

What is the best age to intervene?

An important question that is related to individual interventions is the question about the ideal stage in a young person's development to address this issue.

When body image programs are introduced to children in their teens, it is often the case that body dissatisfaction and dieting for weight loss will already be normative and these practices are very difficult to reverse once established. There may be merit in introducing prevention programs to younger children.⁶⁶

Interventions introduced earlier promoting increased knowledge and critical thinking skills may be effective in counteracting unhealthy pressures, before they translate into established behaviour. However, rather than simply introducing interventions to younger students, interventions tailored to the target age group are likely to be more effective.⁶⁷

This view is based on the idea that there is a role for primary prevention programs that are implemented before problems develop. The goal is to maintain health. Examples of early intervention programs support the belief that children can acquire a knowledge base as they enter a vulnerable stage in their development, and as they face increasing unhealthy pressures about appearance, weight and eating.^{68,69} However, no longitudinal studies were found that demonstrated that early intervention can help prevent a decline in body image later in school. It may be that a series of interventions are required at different age levels, each being developmentally appropriate.

The need to be holistic when developing intervention strategies

There are many factors at play in the development of body dissatisfaction and so interventions need to target a range of different elements to be effective.

For example, the Victorian Government introduced a Positive Body Image Strategy in 2006. This strategy contained elements targeted at cultural factors, the immediate social environment and individuals. These included:

- a Voluntary Media Code of Conduct (the Victorian Code)
- a Positive Body Image Grants program
- funding to expand the coverage of body image programs, including *BodyThink* and *Girls on the Go!*

Each of these initiatives are explored in more detail later.

In the overview, causes of body dissatisfaction were categorised as cultural, individual or the immediate social environment. Because the immediate social environment generally refers to friends, peers and parents, interventions that target individuals will generally be applicable to these causes as well. For example, targeting a school to promote greater diversity in body shapes and a greater tolerance of individual differences will impact the individuals in that school, as well as the school environment more generally.

In the overview **causes** of body dissatisfaction were categorised as cultural, individual or the immediate social environment

Brief descriptions of different interventions are provided below. These are divided into interventions that are targeted at:

1. individual characteristics and the immediate social environment
2. cultural ideals as distributed and reinforced by the media, fashion and advertising industries.

Interventions aimed at individual characteristics and the immediate social environment

Research has shown there are a range of individual factors that combine to influence the development of body dissatisfaction. These include:

- the degree to which a person internalises external standards and compares their body with others
- the tendency for people to view themselves as other people view them
- a person's self-esteem
- direct pressures from others to conform to a cultural ideal of body image, including teasing or comments about a person's weight
- indirect pressures to conform to a cultural ideal of body image, including modelling behaviours, negative comments made by other people about their own bodies and comments that are supportive of body image ideals, for example about celebrities or models.

Self-esteem

The resilience of young people can be increased by strengthening their ability to resist socio-cultural pressures regarding thinness.⁷⁰ Many programs incorporate protective factors that build on strengths, promote resilience and otherwise help protect participants from the causes of body dissatisfaction.

There have been encouraging findings⁷¹ in using a self-esteem approach for improving body image, eating attitudes and behaviours—significant and lasting improvements in students' body satisfaction and physical self-concept as well as reductions in the importance of peer group acceptability and physical appearance.

The resilience of young people can be increased by strengthening their ability to **resist** socio-cultural pressures regarding thinness

Media literacy

While the research is not conclusive and there would be benefit in further exploration, studies that have included media analysis, media literacy and examination of media gender stereotypes have suggested that it can play an important role in addressing body dissatisfaction.^{72,73} Media literacy programs can show people that media images are often manipulated and unrealistic.

Media literacy fosters a healthy scepticism about mass media messages and encourages young people to think critically about the images that they are confronted with in their everyday lives. In this way, media literacy can help young people become active consumers rather than passive victims of media influence⁷⁴ and this can lead to a decrease in the internalisation of cultural ideals and goals associated with body dissatisfaction.⁷⁵

As outlined above, communicating these messages to groups, for example, in schools or community organisations, can influence not only individuals, but groups of individuals.

Critical thinking

Similar to media literacy, critical thinking can help protect young people against internalising external standards that are unhealthy or lead to body dissatisfaction. This may include teaching critical thinking skills that help young people to:

- develop their capacity to understand and actively interpret, rather than passively accept, their environment
- step outside the values held by their culture, peers and family, and evaluate the norms according to more personal and positive criteria.

Challenging the thin ideal and body comparison

Peer group and social environments can encourage internalisation of the thin ideal, appearance conversations and body comparison which contribute to body dissatisfaction. However, interventions which encourage actively challenging thought processes which promote the thin ideal^{76,77,78} can help change these attitudes and friendship group behaviours and improve body image. This approach may include teaching skills that help young people to:

- develop skills to change negative peer interactions around appearance and dieting
- identify and challenge body comparisons
- reduce appearance teasing
- change peer group norms

Examples of programs

- The Butterfly Foundation's *BodyThink* program, supported by the Dove Self Esteem fund, involves teaching media literacy skills. It aims to help young people understand and deal with feelings about their physical appearance, in particular their weight and shape. *BodyThink* is also one of the few body image interventions that has been rigorously evaluated and shown to be useful in addressing some of the causal factors of body dissatisfaction among adolescents over three months.⁷⁹ A longer term follow-up is required. As noted above, the *BodyThink* program is being funded as part of the Victorian Government's Positive Body Image Strategy. For more information visit www.thebutterflyfoundation.org.au/bodythink_school_presentations
- *Positive Body Image Grants* are another component of the Victorian Government Strategy. The Grants were launched to promote positive body image to young people, and aim to support local communities to implement positive body image health and wellbeing programs involving:
 - Community education
 - Practical skills and learning
 - Information and awareness
 - Peer group support
 - Resources and tools

Successful grants demonstrate a clear understanding about the issues surrounding body image, including encouraging healthy lifestyle choices, increasing self-esteem and confidence in young people. For more information visit www.youth.vic.gov.au/web21/ofy/dvcofy.nsf/headingpagesdisplay/grants+and+programspositive+body+image#Positive

- *Girls on the Go!* was developed by the Greater Dandenong Community Health Service in response to an increased number of young women presenting with negative body image or disordered eating patterns. The program has been delivered since 2001 and receives funding through the Victorian Government's Positive Body Image Strategy. *Girls on the Go!* takes a holistic approach to body image issues, with particular care being taken to shift the focus of the group away from issues of 'weight' and 'dieting' to general health, wellbeing, self-esteem and happiness. The program includes training for school staff and other workers to help them empower young women to become healthier and happier. For more information visit www.girlsonthego.com.au/index.php

- *Young Women, Body Image and the Digital Age* is another Victorian Government funded initiative. Hosted by the Queen Victoria Women's Centre, this was a full day forum held in April 2007 with girls from a range of secondary schools and educated them about the use of technology in creating images. Girls then presented the information back to classmates and friends as part of the program. For more information visit www.qvwc.org.au/news_and_events/news_qvwc_email_newsletter/news_qvwc_archive_2007_2008/news_qvwc_february_2007/young_women_body_image_and_the_digital_age
- *The My Body, My Life: Body Image Program for Adolescent Girls* is particularly interesting because it was delivered over the internet and has been evaluated as part of formal research. The program was held throughout 2007 and consisted of online group sessions that were facilitated by a guided self-help manual and trained therapist. The program was based on cognitive behaviour principles and addressed a range of body image related issues, including:
 - unhealthy eating patterns
 - a rationale for normalising eating
 - teaching self-monitoring
 - the relationships between low self-esteem, depression, interpersonal relationships and body dissatisfaction
 - motivations and strategies for change

The *My Body, My Life* program proved successful in significantly reducing body dissatisfaction, disordered eating patterns, depressive symptoms, and to a lesser extent, internalisation of the media ideal in girls aged 12–18 years. There was also evidence of these results being maintained, and in some cases even improved, as part of follow-up studies.⁸⁰ For more information visit www.latrobe.edu.au/psy/projects/bodylife/

- *Happy Being Me* is a promising school based-body image intervention for young adolescent girls that was developed from a theoretical understanding of the causes of body dissatisfaction. The program was designed to reduce the causal risk factors, particularly internalisation of the thin ideal, body comparisons, and appearance conversations and teasing in peer groups with the assumption that this would inhibit the frequency and intensity of body dissatisfaction. Risk factors and body image were improved over a three month period. Although longer term follow-up studies are required, the outcomes of the study support the use of interventions that are based on addressing the causal factors of body image, as outlined in theory on the issue.⁸¹

- The YWCA runs programs that encourage women to have a positive and healthy perspective on their bodies. These include:
 - *Celebrate You Week* which is a national YWCA health promotion event that provides an opportunity to highlight issues of self-esteem, body image and women's holistic well-being. For more information visit www.ywca-canberra.org.au/_webapp_163849/Celebrate_You_Week
 - *International No Diet Day* and *Eat Cake Day* aim to discourage diet myths and encourage a healthy relationship with food. It promotes a healthy balance and a happy lifestyle. For more information visit www.ywca.net/default.asp?id=80

The YWCA of Adelaide also conducted a survey on body image that may be of interest. The *2002 Girlstalk Body Image Survey Results* provide information on how girls feel about their body, as well as the prevalence of potentially harmful behaviours that are associated with these feelings. To view the results of this survey visit www.ywca.com.au/campaigns/body_image_survey%20results.pdf

- *Reach Out* is a youth mental health website run by the Inspire Foundation and is partly funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. *Reach Out's* objectives are to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 14–25 years through improving their understanding of mental health issues, developing their resilience, increasing their coping skills and facilitating their help-seeking behaviour. For more information visit www.reachout.com.

The five core components are:

1. **Mental Health Research:** supported by information created by young people.
2. **Online community forum:** a peer-moderated community where young people can learn how to get through difficult times.
3. **Gaming:** Reach Out Central, an online game that provides young people with the opportunity to practice skills, such as communication, problem solving and optimistic thinking.
4. **Self-expression:** social networking and digital storytelling allowing young people to express them selves creatively.
5. **Portable digital media:** Reach Out! Podcasts and SMS allow young people to download clips or receive SMS providing information on how to cope with challenging situations.

Reach Out also has information on Body Image including 'How to Love the Skin You're In', as well as on eating disorders. There is also the *Reach Out Teachers' Network (ROTN)* that links teachers to resources to equip them to promote and manage mental health issues in the school setting. For more information on the ROTN visit www.reachoutpro.com.au.

- *The National Organization for Women (NOW) Foundation's Love Your Body Campaign.* Based in the United States, the NOW Foundation encourages positive body image messages among women through a range of initiatives designed to culminate in the Love Your Body Day, held on 15 October of each year. Initiatives include a:
 - campaign website that includes examples of positive ads and suggestions about how to encourage women to love their bodies
 - calendar comprised of Love Your Body Poster Contest winners
 - PowerPoint presentation: Sex, Stereotypes and Beauty: The A, B C and Ds of Commercial Images of Women, which people are encouraged to download to show in a classroom, workshop or other group setting.

You can visit the Love Your Body campaign website at <http://loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org/>

Interventions aimed at cultural ideals of body image

Example of the Victorian Voluntary Media Code of Conduct on Body Image⁸²

In Victoria, the state government has developed and implemented a Voluntary Media Code of Conduct as part of its strategy to promote positive body image.

The Victorian Code is applicable to the media, fashion and advertising industries. As such, it is framed in a way that is broad enough to deal with the major issues that impact on all of these industries.

The aims for the Victorian Code are to:

- encourage healthy portrayals of body image rather than lay blame
- be embraced by a wide range of stakeholders
- be promoted from within industry
- be realistic in intent with achievable aims
- state the commercial imperative.

The Working Group also recommended that a code of conduct:

- be voluntary so that it preserved freedoms and as a means of guarding against unnecessary censorship within the industries
- be led by industry
- has the potential to be most effective on a national level, as the industries involved generally operate on a national level.

Rather than revisit the development of the code from the beginning, this paper outlines the process by which the Victorian Government's Working Group on Body Image arrived at their recommendations for a code.

Three options for a code of conduct were presented in the Working Group on Body Image, reflecting the varied possibilities for tailoring a code of conduct to the relevant industries. The following table presents these options and their benefits and limitations, as described by the Victorian Working Group.

Table 1—Summary of discussion of the Victorian Media Code of Conduct on Body Image Working Group

Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
One new code	Three new codes	Clauses within existing codes (this option was not recommended by the Victorian Working Group)
Universally deals with the media, advertising and fashion industries	One code for each industry, reflecting issues specific to each industry	Update the existing codes that regulate each industry to ensure they more clearly deal with body image issues

Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<p>Benefits</p> <p>Addresses the body image issue broadly, recognising the complementary parts all three industries play</p> <p>Attracts more interest and a sharper focus to body image issues</p> <p>Simpler to put into action than multiple codes</p> <p>Allows the three industries to work together and reach some point of consensus</p>	<p>Benefits</p> <p>Can be developed to address each specific industry, targeting their unique needs</p> <p>Consensus within industry may be easier to gain than from different groups</p>	<p>Benefits</p> <p>Existing codes in the advertising and media industries already hold respect and currency with stakeholders</p> <p>Consensus within industry may be easier to gain than from different groups</p>
<p>Limitations</p> <p>May be difficult to negotiate a plan of action due to specific differences between the industries' approaches to the body image issue</p> <p>As a result, Option 1 would need to be broad</p>	<p>Limitations</p> <p>Will not make as much of an impact as a universal code, especially with regard to media attention and public awareness for body image issues</p> <p>There would be no need to reach consensus between the industry groups and so separate codes may not achieve the same end result as one unified effort</p> <p>May result in more administration</p> <p>NB—there is significant crossover between stakeholder groups</p>	<p>Limitations</p> <p>Existing codes have different agendas</p> <p>The non-existence of fashion industry code</p> <p>Clause(s) on body image could be lost amidst already existing, lengthy and technical codes</p> <p>Profiling opportunities for public awareness may be insignificant or non-existent</p> <p>Missed opportunity in creating a group to lead new code</p> <p>Diminished role for Government to 'lead the charge' and remain involved</p>

The working group found general support for Option 1 and recommended one broad code containing four clauses apply across different industries.

The Victorian Government's Voluntary Media Code of Conduct on Body Image covers:

- **Altered and Enhanced Images.** The use of unachievable and unrealistic digitally-manipulated images of people in the media is discouraged. If such alteration has occurred, digitally-altered images should be disclosed and accompanied by a 'tag' stating that "this image has been digitally altered" to help young people make a balanced appraisal.
- **Diversity in Shapes.** Consideration should be given to the inclusion of a variety of body shapes, to provide fair representation in both editorial and advertising images.
- **Fair Placement.** Consideration should be given to the editorial context in which diet, exercise or cosmetic surgery advertising is placed.
- **Modelling Health.** Glamorisation of severely underweight models or celebrities is potentially dangerous; effort should be made to depict people of healthy weight and size.

Media and advertising regulations and guidelines in Australia

Australia is already well served by a strong framework of self-regulatory, co-regulatory and legislative measures that provide guidelines for the mass media, including advertisers. For example the:

- Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) has registered codes of practice for the pay television and free-to-air commercial television and radio broadcasting sectors, and the internet.
- Advertising Standards Bureau (ASB), which administers the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) Code of Ethics and AANA Code for Marketing & Advertising Communications to Children
- Weight Management Code of Practice, administered by the Weight Management Council Australia Ltd

By way of example, if someone was to see an advertisement that they thought promoted a body image they thought was unhealthy they could write to the ASB. The Advertising Standards Board (the Board) would review the advertisement against section 2.6 of the AANA Code of Ethics, which states 'Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards[†] on health and safety'.⁸³

[†] Prevailing Community Standards means the community standards determined by the Advertising Standards Board as those prevailing at the relevant time, and based on research carried out on behalf of the Advertising Standards Board as it see fit, in relation to Advertising or Marketing Communications.

If the Board considered the advertisement breached community standards they could request that the advertiser remove or amend the offending advertisement.‡

As illustrated by this example, community attitudes are used to determine what is or is not acceptable. This poses interesting questions about what role these regulatory bodies should take when confronted with images that might contribute to an accepted, yet harmful, cultural standard.

Retail

Sportsgirl, with advice from The Butterfly Foundation and body image experts, developed a 'Statement of Commitment to Positive Body Image'. The statement covers four areas:

- recruitment and staff support
- sizing and selling
- advertising and promotion
- community support.

The statement can be viewed in full at www.sportsgirl.com.au/index.html.

Fashion industry and models

The implications of choosing one broad code, as opposed to industry specific measures, can be seen when comparing the Victorian Code with international initiatives that have been introduced in response to the specific needs and requirements of the fashion industry.

Concerns about the health of models and public and media outcry about the use of unnaturally skinny models prompted a range of responses throughout the international fashion industry, generally based around high profile fashion week shows, including:

Madrid. In September 2006, the organisers of Madrid's fashion week, the Pasarela Cibeles, reached a voluntary agreement with the city's regional Government to turn away models with a Body Mass Index (BMI) below 18. Doctors attended the events to check the models, however, contributors to the inquiry described the action as 'window dressing'. There is also no mention of the BMI test in the rules for participants on Pasarela Cibeles' website.

‡ In just over ten years of operation, advertising self-regulation has a 100 per cent record of industry compliance with Board decisions. www.adstandards.com.au/pages/page14.asp

Milan. In December 2006 Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana, which organises the Fashion Weeks in Milan and Rome, agreed to a self-regulation manifesto with the Italian Government. The Manifesto covers a range of issues, including:

- what should be considered the Italian ideal of beauty
- protecting the health of models and not allowing models with eating disorders to work
- limiting the age of models in the professional fashion industry to 16 years or older
- increasing the size of clothes introduced by Italian fashion houses

London. The British Fashion Council (BFC) and London Development Agency (LDA) established the Model Health Inquiry (MHI) in March 2007, in response to public concerns for the health of models on London's catwalks. The report was released in September 2007, and included 13 recommendations that covered issues that included:

- limiting the age of models who appear on the catwalk to 16 years or older
- requiring a medical certificate for models who are to appear in the London Fashion Week[¥]
- establishing a models' health education and awareness program and ensuring the environment in which models work is healthy
- Increase funding for research into eating disorders

Also of interest is that while digital manipulation was outside the remit of the MHI, recommendation eight stated that they believe it forms part of the wider issue of model health: "We are aware that digitally manipulating body shape can perpetuate an unachievable aesthetic and think the industry should give consideration to a voluntary code governing its use."⁸⁴

New York. The Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) formed a health initiative in January 2007 to respond to concerns about unhealthily thin models. The message from the CFDA was that designers share a responsibility to protect women, and very young girls in particular, within the business.

In summary. These initiatives are generally aimed at regulating or encouraging industry behaviour to ensure models are educated about healthy eating, not taken advantage of, and are in good health, particularly in relation to whether or not they are suffering from eating disorders. Encouragingly, these initiatives tend to recognise and respond to the role the fashion industry can have on cultural ideals of beauty. For example, the Italian Fashion Industry Manifesto for Self-Regulation against Anorexia states:

[¥] Of the 13 recommendations, the recommendation related to the introduction of the medical certificate was the most contentious and difficult to implement. The BFC conducted a feasibility study and pilot into mandatory Model Health Certificates, the key findings of the study and pilot were that they would not work as they were proposed.

"Many young women suffering from eating disorders are young and began dieting to gain the 'ideal' figure of the models seen on catwalks and on magazine covers. What they seek to follow is portrayed as the only possible model of beauty. Therefore, we are aware that young people are influenced by the example and lifestyle of the models, where extreme thinness becomes something to imitate."

The Italian Manifesto further recognises and attempts to utilise Italy's cultural basis of beauty by committing to *"re-value a model of beauty which is healthy, warm, generous and Mediterranean, which is already the historical legacy of Italy, as we believe that still today these are the positive criteria that should be promoted to the women of Italy and the world."*

Magazines

Both of the following magazines participated in the development of the Victorian Code and have shown how the print industry can healthily respond to body image issues and make this a basis for the development and marketing of the product.

Girlfriend. Girlfriend Magazine runs a self-respect campaign which encourages girls to think positively about their life, body and what really makes them happy.

Indigo. Indigo was launched in August 2007. It aims to be a fun, body-friendly alternative to other magazines targeted to girls aged 10–14 years old. The magazine seeks to represent girls as real and healthy individuals and deals with issues such as puberty, bullying, self-esteem and body image in a positive manner.

PART THREE

EXAMPLES OF RELATED AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The Australian Government has a large number of initiatives that deal with issues that could involve, or are related to, body image. For example, current initiatives relate to:

- mental health, including eating disorders
- media portrayal of mental health issues
- healthy school communities
- digital media literacy
- healthy eating
- clothing sizes.

Importantly, these programs cover the areas that have been discussed as part of both the research and best practice sections of this paper.

The National Eating Disorders Collaboration

The Australian Government is funding the Butterfly Foundation \$500,000 to establish a National Eating Disorders Collaboration project that will bring together experts to develop a comprehensive, coordinated national approach to eating disorders.

The collaboration will:

- bring together key organisations and eating disorder experts involved in mental health, public health, health promotion, education and research, as well as media experts
- review information currently available to young people and their families on the prevention and management of eating disorders through the web and existing organisations
- undertake a literature review of the evidence for effective promotion, prevention, and early intervention and treatment of eating disorders
- develop a website to provide clear and effective messages and resources for the public in relation to eating disorders
- promote evidence-based messages and information about the prevention and management of eating disorders to schools, the media and to health service providers
- develop an evidence-based framework for the development of promotion, prevention and early interventions for eating disorders targeting school aged children
- provide evidence-based information to Government on how to progress and target effective messages around both obesity and eating disorders.

The Australian Government will invest \$3 million over four years to build upon the work of the Collaboration project through the National Partnership Agreement for Preventive Health.

For more information visit
www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr09-nr-nr036.htm?OpenDocument

The Australian Government will **invest** \$3 million over four years to build upon the work of the Collaboration project...

Australian Better Health Initiative

The Australian Better Health Initiative (ABHI) was announced in February 2006 by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) as a joint Australian, State and Territory Government initiative.

A total of \$500 million over four years was assigned to this national program which aims to reduce the occurrence of risk factors contributing to chronic disease, and limit the new and current cases of disease in Australia.

One of the activities aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles under the ABHI is a rolling program of national social marketing campaign activities to raise awareness of healthy lifestyle choices.

The campaign is for all Australians and aims to provide them with the tools and understanding to make healthy lifestyle choices.

The campaign primarily targets 25-50 year olds who have children, as parents' behaviour is likely to have an impact on their children's lifestyle behaviours. Parents also tend to be interested in their long-term health and want to see their children grow up.

The short term objectives for the first phase of the campaign are:

- to increase awareness of the link between chronic disease and lifestyle risk factors (poor nutrition, physical inactivity, unhealthy weight)
- to raise appreciation of why lifestyle change should be an urgent priority
- to generate more positive attitudes towards achieving recommended changes in healthy eating, physical activity and healthy weight
- to generate confidence in achieving the desired changes and appreciation of the significant benefits of achieving these changes.

The long term objectives of the campaign are:

- to encourage Australians to make and sustain changes to their behaviour, such as increased physical activity and healthier eating behaviours, towards recommended levels
- to thereby contribute to reducing morbidity and mortality due to lifestyle related chronic disease in Australian adults.

For more information visit

www.health.gov.au/internet/abhi/publishing.nsf/Content/About+the+campaign-lp

Headspace

Headspace is Australia's National Youth Mental Health Foundation and its mission is to deliver improvements in the mental health, social wellbeing and economic participation of young Australians aged 12–25. Headspace aims to be the focal point for youth mental health issues across the country. This includes providing funding to improve services for young people who may be experiencing mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues and the latest information about these important health issues for young people.

Mental health and drug and alcohol issues are two of the biggest health issues facing young Australians today. *Headspace* and its partner organisations are working on a range of strategies which will make a difference to young Australians, their families and service providers across the country, including:

- building the capacity of local communities to identify and provide early and effective responses to young people with emerging mental health and drug and alcohol issues through a national Youth Services Development Fund
- collecting and building on the best available evidence-based practice in youth mental health through the Centre of Excellence and making this information available to those working in the field
- encouraging early help seeking by young people with mental health and substance use issues through a range of local and national Community Awareness activities
- assisting a range of professionals and practitioners who work with young people to build their skills in the drug and alcohol and mental health through Education and Training resources and initiatives

For more information visit

www.headspace.org.au/home

MindMatters

MindMatters is the Commonwealth's framework for improving the mental health outcomes of students, using a range of resources to increase the capacity of Australian secondary schools for mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention. It includes the delivery of professional development to teachers and other key school personnel and the provision of materials to support a whole school approach.

MindMatters schools assist students, including those struggling with body image issues, to develop social and emotional skills that enhance resilience, resourcefulness, respect, interconnectedness and interrelationships to meet life's challenges and enhance mental health.

For more information visit

www.mindmatters.edu.au/default.asp

KidsMatter

KidsMatter is a national primary school mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative developed in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, beyondblue: the national depression initiative, the Australian Psychological Society, and the Australian Principals Association. KidsMatter aims to improve the mental health and well-being of primary school students, reduce mental health problems among students, and achieve greater support for those students experiencing mental health problems.

KidsMatter targets the mental health and well-being of all primary school students through creating a positive school environment, and providing education on social and emotional skills for life. KidsMatter also provides parenting education and support, and help at school for those students who are exposed to psychological and social stresses.

For more information visit

www.health.gov.au/internet/mentalhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/kidsmatter-1

KidsMatter Suite of Activities

The KidsMatter suite of activities is the centrepiece of the work plan for the COAG *New Early Intervention Services for Parents Children and Young People* measure. The suite of activities includes:

- national roll-out of the KidsMatter Primary School program;
- preparation for the commencement of a KidsMatter early childhood initiative;
- development and implementation of KidsMatter parent initiatives;

- provision of support for groups at highest risk: children who have experienced significant trauma, loss and grief; children of parents with a mental illness, and children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background; and
- expansion of the ResponseAbility teacher education initiative to early childhood workers.

ResponseAbility Education

The ResponseAbility *Education* initiative seeks to facilitate the integration of mental health promotion, prevention, early intervention and suicide prevention issues into secondary, primary and early childhood teacher education via the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector.

For more information visit

www.responseability.org/site/index.cfm

Education based interventions

While education falls within the jurisdictional responsibilities of state and territory governments, the Australian Government provides advice and administers programs that support the Government's objectives in relation to student wellbeing issues.

To date, interventions by the Australian Government have focussed on the areas of school drug education, safe school environments and physical activity and obesity. However, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has recently completed a scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing. The purpose of this study was to identify evidence based links between student wellbeing (physical, emotional and mental) and learning outcomes. The project also investigated state and territory policies and practices on student wellbeing, the merits and possibility for introducing a model for a national framework. This study was completed in December 2008 and the results are being considered by DEEWR.

Preventative Health Taskforce

The Preventative Health Taskforce has been established to provide evidence-based advice to government and health providers (both public and private) on preventative health programs and strategies, and support the development of a National Preventative Health Strategy. The Strategy will set out how to tackle the burden of chronic disease currently caused by obesity, tobacco, and excessive consumption of alcohol. It will be directed at primary prevention and will be finalised by June 2009.

Mindframe National Media Initiative (Mindframe Initiative)

The Australian Government's *Mindframe Initiative* aims to encourage responsible, accurate and sensitive media representation of mental illness and suicide, and to advocate on behalf of community concerns relating to media depictions that stigmatise mental illness or promote self-harm.

Mindframe consists of a suite of interconnected strategies including:

- Mindframe Media & Mental Health
- Mindframe for the Mental Health Sector
- Mindframe for Police
- Mindframe for Courts
- Mindframe Stage and Screen
- ResponseAbility Journalism
- StigmaWatch and the SANE Media Centre
- Media Monitoring.

These projects are delivered by a number of contracted service providers including the Hunter Institute of Mental Health and SANE Australia, in partnership with the Australian Network for Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention (Auseinet), and Multicultural Mental Health Australia.

Mindframe is guided by the National Media and Mental Health Group which consists of representation from the media and mental health sectors.

Since its inception *Mindframe* has continued in a cooperative relationship with members of the news media and has moved into other areas of work including the mental health sector, police and courts and the Australian film and television industry.

For more information visit
www.mindframe-media.info

Digital Media Literacy

For many young people belonging to an online social network shapes the nature of peer relations not only online, but in other contexts too. A growing body of research suggests there are a number of positive benefits associated with the rise in online social networks, which include greater opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and self expression, including participation in new creative forms through blogs, video-production, video or picture manipulation.

Some scholars suggest that the ability to embrace participatory cultures has become a new form of 'hidden curriculum' which is starting to shape who will succeed and who will be left behind as people enter school and move out into the workplace.

However, ACMA research indicates that almost 50 per cent of Australians don't know where to find information about protecting personal information when using social media. Effective participation in social media activities depends not only on knowing how to access and use broadband services and social networking websites, but also understanding when and where it is appropriate to divulge personal information online.

For more information visit

www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_311470

Textile clothing review

The Textile Clothing and Footwear Industry review conducted by Professor Roy Green made a recommendation to Government that a new Australian National Sizing Standard for clothing and footwear be developed.

There are many reasons for a new national sizing standard. However, beyond strongly felt industry needs, the Government is aware that this recommendation also tackles the link between how Australian women feel about their bodies and the fact that dress size standards are out of touch with the reality of the modern Australian woman's body.

Research has identified that confusion in sizing standards does have an impact on self esteem and body image. This is the first time that a recommendation for a national response to sizing has gone to Government, and with a request for Government funding. It is recommended that a new national standard be in place by 2010. A response to the review is due from Minister Carr in early 2009.

For more information visit

www.innovation.gov.au/tcfreview/Pages/ReviewofTextileClothingFootwearIndustry.aspx

A Healthy and Active Australia

The Government hosts a healthy active website that provides a range of information and initiatives on healthy eating and regular physical activity to assist all Australians to lead healthy and active lives. As part of the website, there is information on healthy weight, which includes broad parameters for assessing weight, healthy eating guidelines and tips for various age ranges, including teenage girls.

For more information visit
www.healthyactive.gov.au

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