12th November 2019

Dear Minister,

Re: NHMRC Clinical Practice Guidelines for the management of overweight and obesity in adults, adolescents and children in Australia

The Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society (ANZOS) was established in 1991 and represents over 300 medical practitioners; dietitians; scientists and other health professionals interested in research, clinical practice and public health initiatives directed at the prevention and management of obesity.

It is our understanding that the 2013 NHMRC Clinical Practice Guidelines for the management of overweight and obesity in adults, adolescents and children in Australia have been rescinded due to their age – being over five years old.

We are concerned that the guidelines have not been updated, particularly given the number of clinicians and patients to whom the guidelines are relevant and the high rates of confusion about managing obesity that exists amongst clinicians.

This issue is of great importance as increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity in Australia represents a significant threat to population health. In 2017-18, 67% of Australians aged 18 years and over were overweight or obese (12.5 million people), up from 63% in 2014-15. Early intervention in primary care and community health settings can help avoid later presentations to the health system for obesity related disease.

A 2017 RACGP report found that managing obesity and complications was a major concern of GPs regarding future of primary care (second only to mental health). Research in Australia and internationally consistently finds that a minority of patients are receiving health professional led weight management advice despite most patients wanting such advice.

Health professionals report that they lack skills as well as time to have effective conversations about weight management with clients and are often unsure where to find evidence based resources or referral pathways for patients requiring additional support or intervention.

In contrast, advice to patients from Government and health organisations is to discuss their weight with their GP or other health professional.

Up to date evidence based Clinical Guidelines are of great importance to health professionals working in a range of settings. Currently your government is working to develop a National Obesity Strategy, of which treatment and management of obesity would be an important additional element. As part of this up to date national guidelines can provide evidence on obesity management, advice on conducting effective brief interventions,
highlight quality patient resources and advice on points to consider in secondary and tertiary care as well as summarise referral pathways.

We urge the Government to commission the National Health and Medical Research Council to update and release new clinical guidelines for the management of overweight and obesity.

If you would like further information on this important matter, please don’t hesitate to contact me by email Jane.Martin@cancervic.org.au. I look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,

Jane Martin
President, Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society

1 National Health and Medical Research Council (2013). Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Management of Overweight and Obesity in Adults, Adolescents and Children in Australia. Melbourne: NHMRC.
8 LiveLighter 2017, Shape of Australia national survey found 77% of respondents felt comfortable talking to their health professional about their weight, and 34% turned to their doctor for weight advice (second highest source after ‘online’).