

Politics, policy and pessimism: **What Australians think**



Poll 3, June 2016

Detailed report: Part C

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Child health policy: **What Australians want**

Report highlights:

- **The majority of Australians, regardless of age, income and parental status, support federally funded interventions to tackle child health issues**
- **Australians overwhelmingly support government interventions targeted at childhood obesity including a tax on sugary drinks, compulsory daily physical activity in schools and a ban on junk food advertising**
- **Almost 70% of Australians support government-funded fulltime childcare or kindergarten for four-year-olds and a change to the funding of welfare workers in schools**

In a survey fielded in April 2016, more than 2,100 Australian adults were asked to indicate their support for five proposed interventions relating to the health and wellbeing of Australian children and teenagers. Proposed interventions focussed on topical areas of child health and wellbeing including obesity, early learning opportunities and mental health.

Policies targeted at reducing obesity

Support for intervention targeting obesity was strong across all demographic subgroups. The highest level of support was seen for the introduction of compulsory daily physical activity in primary schools (88%), followed by a gradual ban on the advertising of junk food aimed at children and teenagers (79%), and the introduction of a tax on sugary drinks (61%) (see *Figure 1*). Majority support for all three items was seen across all age groups, and strongest among adults aged 50 years and over. Respondents reporting lower household income (\$1,000 per week) and incomplete secondary education were slightly less likely to support a tax on sugary drinks and junk food advertising ban than those reporting higher household income and completed secondary education, but still the majority in these demographic subgroups were in support of both interventions.

Of note, all three proposed interventions were equally well supported by parents and non-parents, people across all states and territories and those from both urban and regional locations.

Funded fulltime childcare/ kindergarten for four-year-olds

Nationwide, 68% of Australians indicated support for the use of government funds to make fulltime childcare or kindergarten available to all Australian children aged four years and over (see Figure 1). Support was strongest among parents of younger children (firstborn aged zero to five years) (83%), but notably 63% of people without children aged less than 18 years indicated support for the policy. Similarly, those younger than 50 years were more likely to support the policy (73%), but a majority of Australians aged 50 years and over also supported free fulltime kindergarten for all four-year-olds (64%). A small state-based variation was noted with Queenslanders indicating marginally less support for this policy (60%) than respondents residing in other states. Highest levels of support were seen in South Australian residents (76%), closely followed by Victoria (74%) and Western Australia (71%), perhaps reflecting current policies in each state.

Support for non-religious welfare workers in schools

Nearly 70% of Australians indicated support for a change to the national school chaplaincy program to also pay for non-religious welfare workers in schools. Majority support for this proposal was seen across all demographic subgroups, and highest among respondents aged less than 50 years and those who are parents of children aged less than 18 years.

Implications

These results tell us that Australians are overwhelmingly in support of government intervention to tackle child health issues. Problems such as childhood obesity and mental health problems are on the rise. This poll shows that children's health issues are very much among mainstream voters' priorities, regardless of voters' demographic characteristics. On the eve of the federal election, these findings should give our political leaders the confidence to know that there is public support for what might seem like radical policy interventions when it comes to the wellbeing of Australian children and teenagers. And it is not just parents and younger people that support action on child health, but the vast majority of Australians.

Data source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by the Online Research Unit for The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. The survey was administered from April 5 to April 19, 2016, to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults aged 18 and older (n=2,113). The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect Australian population figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. More than half of the sample were parents or caregivers of children aged less than 18 years (n=1,050). The completion rate was 50% among Online Research Unit panel members contacted to participate.

Public support for proposed child health interventions

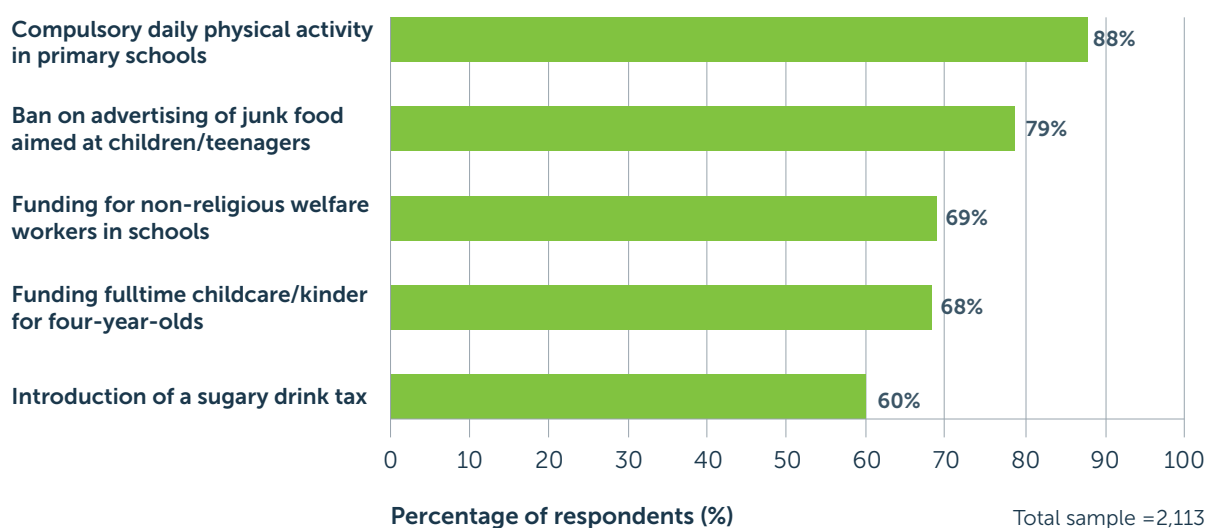


Figure 1.

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