



ACE-Obesity Policy Study (2012-2018)

Summary of feedback from government stakeholders

July 2020



Aim

- We aimed to understand key government stakeholder perspectives on the ACE-Obesity Policy study (2012-2018).
- Our specific focus was to gain insight into the extent to which the outputs from the ACE-Obesity Policy study had been utilized within government departments in Australia, the extent to which the results were contributing to policy processes, and to understand ways in which to strengthen and improve similar initiatives to increase their utilization and impact.

Methods

- In May/June 2020 (approximately 18 months after the release of the ACE-Obesity Policy study main findings), we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with key government stakeholders (n=11) who were identified as target end-users of the ACE-Obesity Policy study.
- Interview participants included senior representatives of Health departments in federal and state/territory governments in Australia.
- Interview participants were asked to reflect on the ways the ACE-Obesity Policy study findings had been utilized within government, the impact of the study, and their suggestions on ways in which to strengthen and improve similar initiatives.

General feedback

All participants were positive about the ACE-Obesity Policy report and found it to be a useful source of information. Participants reflected that the ACE-Obesity Policy report formed part of a suite of evidence sources utilised by government officials.

I think it'd be fair to say that the ACE [ACE-Obesity Policy] report was just one piece of evidence that we've used for our review – but very useful.

(Government Stakeholder 5)

It's part of the evidence bank that is helpful.

(Government Stakeholder 3)

One government official commented on some of the more innovative policies included in the report, particularly related to the link between alcohol and obesity.

For me it was that first one [the alcohol tax intervention] that was the real humdinger [most noticeable].

(Government Stakeholder 1)

Interview participants identified that the implementation considerations included in the report were also useful.

[The implementation considerations in the report] were all really useful because obviously it's not just the dollar value, equity's really important, not increasing inequity.

(Government Stakeholder 5)

Utilization of the report: policy development

A number of interview participants gave specific examples of where the ACE-Obesity Policy report had been used or considered in relation to policy development.

Where the ACE [ACE-Obesity Policy report] obviously got talked about was in the National Obesity Strategy and linking in with how that's shaping up.

(Government Stakeholder 1)

We've been doing a review of our [state-level] obesity prevention programs going forward beyond next year, and so [the ACE-Obesity Policy report] was really helpful just to see what evidence there was cost effective-wise for different interventions.

(Government Stakeholder 5)

I have an office that's quite close to our deputy director of public health and he's certainly mentioned it [the ACE-Obesity Policy report] on a number of occasions.

(Government Stakeholder 2)

Utilization of the report: authoritative reference

Several interviewees also mentioned that the report was frequently used to substantiate policy advice or recommendations, although often to support already decided policy directions.

I do know that we utilise different findings within [the ACE-Obesity Policy report] to support briefings on work that we were underway at the time.

(Government Stakeholder 3)

[The ACE-Obesity Policy report] would be something that would be put forward as adding to the weight of evidence for whether we do or don't do something.

(Government Stakeholder 4)

I think we've probably just used [the ACE-Obesity Policy report] to leverage what we wanted to do anyway, if that makes sense. As opposed to saying, "Oh look, this one's better than this one."

(Government Stakeholder 2)

Limitations of the report

One government stakeholder suggested that the ‘strength of evidence’ information in the report was more detrimental than supportive of policy change.

We’re still building the evidence base for what works in obesity prevention so while the report was helpful in some respects it wasn’t in others because it was certainly clear there wasn’t sufficient published, peer-reviewed papers for instance that could be drawn on in terms of making a proper assessment of some interventions.

(Government Stakeholder 5)

If anything it shows that yeah, there’s still a way to go before we’ve got enough data to be able to make a really strong case for some interventions.

(Government Stakeholder 5)

Two state government participants noted that some of the policy interventions in the report were less relevant within the state-level context.

[The ACE-Obesity Policy] study was looking at nationally implemented programs, whereas we’re obviously looking at just those in [our state].

(Government Stakeholder 5)

[The ACE-Obesity Policy report received less attention from senior decision-makers because] it wasn’t specific for [our state].

(Government Stakeholder 1)