

Should the council raise taxes on junk food outlets?

The councils' scheme

The Melbourne and Darebin City Councils plan to charge fast-food outlets up to 400% more on their rates.

Darebin Council believes it has the state's highest rate of Type 2 diabetes.

Darebin councillor Gaetano Greco said they were investigating a rate rise to discourage and penalise major food outlets.

"Councils have the responsibility of looking after the health and wellbeing of their community," he said.

The money would be poured into health promotion programs.

Good idea?

Obesity Policy Coalition executive manager Jane Martin said it showed councils realised it wasn't just about promoting healthy food, but discouraging bad eating behaviour.

Do you levy a differential rate on Coles because they have a chocolate aisle? They say it's about healthy eating, so does that mean they ban every fish and chip shop and Chinese takeaway?

(Lord Mayor Robert Doyle, Melbourne City Council)

A spokesperson for MacDonald's said that more than 70 per cent of MacDonald's restaurants were owned and operated by local people. "If higher rates are introduced, we believe that they should be made

fair across the board and should not penalise particular companies or foods," she said. She said they had cut sugar and salt content across its menu and were providing nutritional choices for customers. "Fast food franchises offer healthy alternatives and eating in moderation their traditional menu is surely the choice of those ordering it."

Education is the best way to help people, not trying to push food franchises out of Darebin. Healthy eating is a national necessity but councils need to involve food outlets through community-based campaigns to improve people's health." (Herald Sun, 15/5/12)

People will just drive elsewhere!

"Great idea", says nutritionist Janey Smithey.

"When these foods become too cheap they are eaten too often. Anything that helps to cut their consumption is a good thing."

"The Federal Government has an individual responsibility, 'pull up your socks' type of approach to this, which I don't think is going to get us any more than what we've got at the moment, which is escalating obesity." (Professor Boyd Swinburn, lecturer in population health at Deakin University, ABC Online, 13/3/2011)

"Banning fast food is not the answer - providing healthier fast food options is. Let's reduce the fat, salt and sugar, use healthier fats and oils and make smaller portions." Clare Hughes, Choice food policy officer, The Age, 3/3/11)

Other ideas?

Many experts are convinced that the government should place a tax on unhealthy foods and use the funds to support healthy food. This will make it more affordable for low-income families to maintain a healthy diet. The price of cakes and soft drinks rose 20 per cent slower than general inflation, while bread and milk rose 20 per cent faster.

People who cannot afford to eat well are at heightened risk of diet-related disease, said Dr Burns.

It is of concern that children in 44 per cent of low income families are obese. This shows that they cannot afford fruit and vegetables.

"We have to ensure that these people can afford a healthy diet," she said, arguing the potential answer

was "taxing the unhealthy food or subsidising the healthy food or a combination of both". Dr Burns's research aims to build a case for using tax and welfare payments to force poor people to eat better. Dr Burns believes that welfare recipients should have to spend payments on good food.

The Government slapped a "sin tax" on cigarettes and this led to a rise in taxes on tobacco. But when it comes to food, the Government has been wary of being seen to support yet another "sin tax".

(Dr Cate Burns, senior research fellow at Deakin University's World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention)

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Place the issue in context. Outline your main contention and support reasons.

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Firstly, it is imperative that Councils raise rates and take decisive action to protect the health of their communities.

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Explain the health problems in Darebin and the Councillor's comments and priorities.

Furthermore, the Governments and councils must use funds to subsidise fresh fruit and vegetables to assist lower income families.

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What is Dr Cate Burn's plan to support healthy life-styles.

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Rebuttal : Some believe that the rate rise will discriminate against certain stores and will be impractical to implement. Many people will drive to the next suburb. (How can you criticise this view?)

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Sometimes it is necessary to take a stand. People may not go elsewhere because they want "fast food".

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Leave the reader with a firm impression that yours is the most important viewpoint.

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It seems that people in Darebin are now the fattest in the state. The latest figures show that Darebin has the highest rate of Type 2 diabetes in the state. As a result, the Darebin Shire plans to introduce a 400 per cent rate increase targeted at fast food outlets. However, whilst it is important to find solutions, this latest scheme of the council is impractical and discriminatory and unfortunately, will not solve the community's health problems. Firstly, it will target certain stores while favouring others. Furthermore, many of these larger fast food outlets provide a very important community service. Therefore, the council must find more practical solutions to target the health problems of its citizens.

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Firstly, the proposal is impractical and discriminatory and would penalise some junk food outlets, while allowing others to flourish. How would the council make distinctions?

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See Lord Mayor's comments about the variety of options that would make such a scheme difficult to implement.

Furthermore, fast food outlets provide a very important community service and any rate rise would discourage their involvement in the Shire.

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- local employment
- healthy food options
- convenience for locals

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Rebuttal : Supporters of the rate rise state that given the dire state of public health, governments and councils must take a strict approach and should not rely on individuals to take responsibility. (How can you criticise this view?)

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However, the fast food outlets should not be penalised because of the poor restraint of many patrons. Also they do have healthy options.

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Leave the reader with a firm impression that yours is the most important viewpoint.

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