December 8, 2016
The Honourable Dr. Jane Philpott
Health Canada
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Tunney’s Pasture
Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9
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Dear Minister Philpott:

Re: Children’s marketing restrictions, federal Healthy Eating Strategy, and support for Bill S-228 and Bill C-313

Our Board of Health writes this letter expressing support for the federal government’s plan to consider marketing restrictions as part of their recently announced Healthy Eating Strategy. This issue requires prompt attention to support the health and well-being of our population. We applaud and offer our express support for the two current private member bills seeking to address this issue: Senator Green-Raine’s private member bill, Bill S-228, which if passed, would prohibit the advertisement of food and beverages to children under the age of 13 years; and Peter Julian’s private member bill C-313, National Strategy on Advertising to Children Act, which focuses on strategy about advertising to children and amending the Broadcasting Act.

Over the last 5 years, it has become clear that restrictions on marketing to children are warranted. Protecting children from exposure to commercial marketing empowers parents to instil healthy habits in their children. Research in this intervention has shown that effective marketing restrictions help prevent chronic health conditions and allow children to grow up without the negative influences that powerfully shape food and beverage choices. National polling has revealed broad population support for such interventions.

Peterborough Public Health said it well:
Young children cannot distinguish between truth and the claims of advertisement. Young children are still developing their palate and food preferences. Parents often complain that they feel powerless to fend off the food industry’s well-funded and well-positioned campaign to create a demand for their products. Ontario’s schools have policies promoting healthy choices in foods and beverages, but leaving the nutritional protection of children up to schools is too little and too late. Clearly we need to do more to protect vulnerable children from the onslaught of marketing to allow families, schools and community agencies like public health to support these children in making healthy choices.
We know:

- Canada has one of the highest rates of advertising to children compared to many other developed countries. There are many different types of advertising to children including television, product packaging, branding, social media and digital technology.
- Advertisers actively target children and youth.
- Children are particularly vulnerable to advertising due to their underdeveloped cognitive and critical thinking skills. It influences preferences, perceptions, purchase requests and consumption patterns. Even adults are highly susceptible to advertising power, though we’d like to believe we’re not.
- Advertising to children is essentially misleading. In 1989, the Supreme Court of Canada concluded that “advertising directed at young children is per se manipulative.”
- Food and beverage advertising is a known contributor to poor food environments, purchasing and eating behaviours, and the development of chronic disease.
- Canadians diets are not meeting recommendations for nutrition and health.
- There is significant evidence that Canada’s current approach to marketing to kids (voluntary regulation) is not working.
- It should be our highest priority to create an environment that supports children to grow up healthy.
- Most major health promotion and public health bodies agree that addressing advertising to children is a top priority.

The Huron County Health Unit is committed to protecting the health and well-being of our residents. We strongly believe that the implementation of federal marketing restrictions, similar to those imposed in Quebec, as part of your recently announced Healthy Eating Strategy, will help to do so.

The Huron County Health Unit can add its voice to the growing concern about the impact of advertising for children with a letter of support for Bill S-228 and Bill C-313.

Sincerely,

Tyler Hessel
Chair, Huron County Board of Health

cc:

Ben Lobb, MP, Huron-Bruce
Lisa Thompson, MPP, Huron-Bruce
Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Ontario Boards of Health