



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**COMMITTEES**

**Health and Ageing Committee**

**Report**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 1 June 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 1 June 2009  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Georganas, Steve, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr GEORGANAS** (Hindmarsh) (8.52 pm)—On behalf of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, I am pleased to present the committee's report entitled *Weighing it up: obesity in Australia*, together with the minutes of proceedings.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

**Mr GEORGANAS**—This report seeks to make a positive contribution to the debate about obesity in Australia and recommends ways to move from debate to action on this issue. The recommendations are presented to parliament and will also inform the national preventative health strategy, which sees tackling obesity as one of its priority areas. The latest National Health Survey figures released last month found that 68 per cent of adult men and 55 per cent of adult women are overweight or obese. Similarly high are the latest statistics on childhood obesity, which indicate that 7.8 per cent of children were considered obese. These figures reinforce the continually emerging data about the high and growing level of obesity in Australia. These figures indicate a significant personal, economic and social cost. Access Economics estimated the total annual cost of obesity in 2008 to be \$58.2 billion. Of this total, the direct financial costs account for \$8.3 billion, with a net cost of lost wellbeing amounting to a further \$49.9 billion. These costs underpin the imperative for action.

The committee believes that individuals have the right to take responsibility for their own weight, but the inquiry has highlighted that the modern environment in which we live can make weight loss extremely difficult. The report outlines 20 recommendations which the committee believes will address the structural problems in our environment which currently encourage obesity. The inquiry heard concern about the lack of current and up-to-date data of the costs and prevalence of obesity and has made recommendations to address these data gaps. A number of witnesses called for changes to the health system to better treat and manage Australians who are overweight or obese. The committee has made recommendations that could achieve this.

There are a number of Australians who are already morbidly obese and whose treatment options are limited. The committee heard strong evidence about the effectiveness of bariatric surgery for those whose previous attempts at weight loss have failed. The committee is wary of recommending people have open slather access to bariatric surgery, but nevertheless argues that access to publicly funded bariatric surgery should be improved for those patients who meet appropriate clinical guidelines.

There is also significant community concern about the role of industry and its contribution to the rate of obesity in Australia. The committee heard evidence about the need for more stringent food labelling, re-formulation of food products and food advertising. Changes in these areas can have benefits, and the committee has recommended that industry be encouraged to make changes initially through self-regulation and working closely with all tiers of government.

The committee has been pleased by the interest in the inquiry and believes that there is real momentum in the community for action to reverse the high levels of obesity. We have seen that there is already significant action occurring within communities across Australia, and these actions should be harnessed as part of the response to obesity in Australia. The committee hopes that this report goes some way to highlighting that.

In conclusion, I am pleased some of my colleagues from the committee are here tonight. I would like to thank members of the committee, the deputy chair of the committee, Steve Irons, and all those who contributed to this inquiry, all the witnesses who put in submissions and gave evidence to the committee. I would also like to thank the secretariat staff for their efforts throughout the inquiry process, in particular James Catchpole, the committee secretary, who is here tonight at the table; Sara Edson, the inquiry secretary; and Penny Wijnberg and Dr Narelle McGluskusky, the senior research officers of the committee. They did magnificent work and worked tirelessly to produce this report. Also I would like to thank Heather Witham from my office and Lilia Bednarek, who earlier on assisted me with the committee. I commend the report to the House.