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### Water shortage in Australian fast food outlets

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## Water shortage in Australian fast food outlets

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such an establishment would prevent the duplication of effort and professional resources directed at SECC. We are not suggesting the establishment of another professional body – there are already too many to choose from. Rather, we are suggesting that a consolidated effort is required to best meet the needs of Australia's future public health workforce. Such collaboration may well require some of the existing professional associations to think more laterally and be more flexible about the types of activities they offer for the SECC. Perhaps profit gained from the recent Congress could be used to build infrastructure at the national level to encourage collaborative action that supports this group. This is likely to build a more robust and well networked public health SECC. We see the SECC as including passionate, intelligent individuals who are committed to working towards a healthier and equitable future. Co-ordinated efforts are now needed to ensure their ongoing involvement. Now is the time for action.

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## Water shortage in Australian fast food outlets

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The ubiquity of fast food restaurants which promote and provide energy-dense foods and sugary beverages has been identified as one significant part of the obesogenic food environment.<sup>1</sup> Fast food restaurants typically offer and promote meal deals that include a major food item (e.g. burger), fried potato and a soft drink<sup>2</sup> in combination, which is promoted as value for money. One way of reducing energy intake is to consume water as an alternative beverage in meal deals. However, recent research indicates that

young adults perceive it to be difficult and more expensive to replace sugary drinks with water in this setting.<sup>3</sup>

We investigated the types of beverages available at major fast food restaurants, and particularly those included in meal deals, through site visits and purchases in a convenience sample of 16 fast food restaurants in a specific Sydney area. The sample comprised two outlets from each of eight major chains. The availability of tap water was tested by observation or request.

Sugary drinks (including soft drinks, juice-based beverages, flavoured milk, iced teas, and sports drinks)<sup>4</sup> and bottled water were available in all restaurants; however sugary drinks comprised the majority of beverage types available (71%). Tap water was available on request in 81% of restaurants.

Sugary drinks were the most frequently promoted beverages (through menus and displays) and comprised 61% of all within store promotions. Sugary drinks were also the default beverage in 80% of meal deals (the remaining 20% explicitly identified a choice). Half of all meal deals that promoted diet sugary drinks (16% of all meal deals), also offered bottled water as an alternative. Bottled water was identified in 16% of within store promotions and was available on request as an alternative in meal deals, at an equivalent price in all cases. The meal deal cost was reduced by 10% when tap water was substituted.

This study confirms that meal deals at fast food restaurants promote the consumption of sugary drinks, however the availability of bottled water is promising. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement, through the promotion of water and the provision of free tap water in fast food restaurants. Currently, the lack of external cues for water contributes to the obesogenic nature of these restaurants.

Given that reductions in the consumption of sugary drinks and energy-dense foods could make a significant contribution to curbing rising obesity rates, efforts to increase public awareness and promote healthier meal deal variations are warranted.

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