

CANADIAN INDUSTRY AN INTERNATIONAL LEADER FOR CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Cathy Loblaw, Concerned Children's Advertisers

Statistics around the health of children as related to obesity and resulting preventable chronic diseases continue to command our attention. One area garnering attention internationally is the role of advertising to children. An important consideration for Canada is to understand the uniquely Canadian practices and safeguards that are currently in place.

A 2005 study by the Institute of Medicine explored the issue of childhood obesity through the lens of advertising and marketing. The IOM ultimately prescribed a list of detailed recommendations aimed at improving child health.

Many of the IOM's recommendations were already established practices in Canada. Among them is a call for a strong, voluntary system for monitoring commercial messages in the US. In Canada, a strictly enforced system of regulations for broadcast advertising of all products to children is a condition of license by the CRTC.

The Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children has strong, specific and mandatory content for child-directed broadcast ads that directs advertisers on what is and is not allowed. From safeguards around safety to considerations of social values, to barring the use of direct urges or well-known characters, the Code is the foundation of responsible advertising to children in Canada. The Code, administered by Advertising Standards Canada, also requires preclearance of every children's commercial by a committee that includes both parents and advertising industry representatives.

Specific to food commercials, Canadian food manufacturers also must submit their advertising for preclearance under the provisions of the highly regulated *Food and Drug Act and Regulations*.

Adding an additional layer of examination to children's communications is Canada's responsive consumer complaint system for all media, under the *Canadian Code of Advertising Standards*. Only one complaint about any ad triggers a review and consideration for action. One measure of the effectiveness of Canada's preclearance system is that over the past five years, ASC has received virtually no complaints about children's advertising.

The IOM report also calls for partnership between the private and public sectors to create social messaging harnessing the power of advertising for healthy living messaging. Once again, Canada leads the way. Canadian industry is actively engaged in a healthy, active living campaign, in partnership with 17 leading NGOs and issue experts as well as Health Canada. In October 2004, Concerned Children's Advertisers launched **Long Live Kids**, a comprehensive program addressing healthy eating, physical activity and media literacy. Reaching 96% of children through nationally televised PSAs, supported by a parent, educator and community program, Long Live Kids is designed to help children in kindergarten to grade 8 "*eat smart, move more and be media wise.*" Two new child-directed PSAs, supported by an online workshop involving parent and educator community resources, will be launched this spring.

Going beyond the recommendations in the IOM report, Canadian industry has also made a longstanding commitment to media literacy education, and encouraging children to balance their activities between those that are active and those that are sedentary. Giving children the skills to construct and deconstruct the media, and helping them to develop a critical thinking filter around all media, including advertising, is a tremendous benefit of the Canadian system —CCA's media literacy program **TV&ME**, is a recommended school resource across Canada.

There are countless studies leading up to and since the IOM report which underscore the role of many partners and all sectors, in helping to address this issue. As we look ahead to continue to develop programs that are among those leading the world, it's important we recognize and celebrate this Canadian model of collaboration that can support the societal changes essential to building healthy lives for our children.

Cathy Loblaw is the President, Concerned Children's' Advertisers, a non-profit organization of leading Canadian companies who partner with government, NGOs and issue experts to create social marketing and education programs for children on issues of challenge in children's lives. Over the past 17 years, Concerned Children's Advertisers has focused on drug abuse prevention, child abuse prevention, child safety, self-esteem, healthy active living, bullying prevention and media literacy.