

What more can governments do?

- 3.1 Governments across Australia can display leadership in the overall direction taken to reduce the current unacceptable levels of overweight and obesity, and has the resources to enable healthier environments. As the Committee heard from a researcher at Flinders University:

The government has the mandate to make sure that the environment supports optimal health and wellbeing of citizens. The government has the power to address structural and environmental determinants. It has the tools: legislation, policy and regulation.¹

- 3.2 The Committee acknowledges that the actions that are required to lose weight must be undertaken by individuals; however governments can make these decisions easier for individuals. At a public hearing in Sydney, Professor Baur from the Children's Hospital at Westmead likened individual behaviour change to rolling a heavy ball up a steep environmental gradient, with the role of government being to reduce the environmental gradient:

...people do need to seek to behave healthily but, if the environment is working against the individual, a huge amount of effort is needed. If that environmental gradient can be changed by having walkable neighbourhoods and easy public transport and with healthy food options being available, it makes it much easier for individuals to make healthy choices ... the importance of governments ... is in helping to make the environmental gradient much lower.²

1 Ms K Mehta, Flinders University, Official Transcript of Evidence, 13 June 2008, p 31.

2 Professor LA Baur, Children's Hospital Westmead, Official Transcript of Evidence, 11 September 2008, p 74.