



FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF BODY IMAGE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND ASSOCIATED EFFECTS ON THEIR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

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Inquiry into Issues Relating to the Development of Body Image among Young People
and Associated Effects on their Health and Wellbeing

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PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES ACT 2003

S.11. The functions of the Family and Community Development Committee are, if so required or permitted under this Act, to inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on—

- (a) any proposal, matter or thing concerned with
 - (i) the family or the welfare of the family;
 - (ii) community development or the welfare of the community;
- (b) the role of the Government in community development and welfare including the welfare of the family.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Governor in Council, under section 4F of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 1968*, requests that the:

Family and Community Development Committee of Parliament inquire into, consider and report to Parliament on issues relating to the development of body image among young people and associated effects on their health and wellbeing.

The Committee is requested to:

1. Identify factors which contribute to the development of body image among young people;
2. Consider:
 - the role of the media, family, the peer group and other potential factors in the development of body image;
 - other factors that impact on body image;
 - the associated health and other impacts of eating disorders, steroid use, and other manifestations of problematic body image, on young people;
 - gender differences in the development of problematic body image.
3. Analyse available medical research on the linkages between mental health and problematic body imagery;
4. Identify good practice in the promotion of positive body image among young people and how risk factors associated with negative body image can be combated;
5. Identify possible improvements to health promotion campaigns aimed at young people, that promote positive body image and self esteem;
6. Investigate the extent to which promoting positive body image and self esteem among young people can help to prevent associated health risks

such as potentially dangerous weight loss methods, eating disorders, steroid use, exercise dependence or avoidance, obesity and mental ill health;

7. Consider whether further strategies are needed to enhance and promote positive body images among young people and, if so, what form the strategies should take (including non-legislative options) and whether these would be best developed by government agencies, the community sector or through partnership arrangements.

The Committee is required to report to Parliament by 31 December 2004.

Dated 18 November 2003

Responsible Minister: HON STEVE BRACKS MP, Premier

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

I have great pleasure in presenting the Family and Community Development Committee's *Final Report* on its *Inquiry into Issues relating to the Development of Body Image among Young People and Associated Effects on their Health and Wellbeing*.

From the outset this Inquiry received a great deal of interest from both the media and the general public resulting in an extensive body of evidence and a large number of submissions. This reflects the level of concern which exists in the community around issues of body image and the associated medical and psychological effects which can occur where there is an imbalance.

While it has been estimated that body image dissatisfaction can result in extreme dieting and eating disorders in 2- 4% of the population, it affects a far greater proportion of young people at a dangerous yet less acute level. The Committee has, therefore, placed stress on the development of strategies which promote self esteem and resilience, defences against the onset of body image dissatisfaction. In addition to prevention, the Committee has also examined Australian and international treatment and intervention models for acute eating disorders encouraging the development and trial of new models proven to be successful.

In conducting this Inquiry the Committee has been aware that increases in the numbers of young people suffering eating disorders and body dissatisfaction has occurred at a time when obesity is also a serious problem in the community. Thus, the Committee has emphasised the importance of total health and lifestyle programs for young people -at home,

school and community level- promoting the role of healthy eating and activity.

In order to address the terms of reference in full the report has been divided into five chapters. The first chapter of this report provides an overview of the subject and illustrates the extent of the problem as well as highlighting issues of importance.

The second chapter seeks to identify factors which contribute to the development of body image among young people. The family, media and peers are suggested in the Terms of Reference, however the Committee has investigated a range of additional factors which may determine an individuals body image in a both a positive and negative way.

The third chapter examines the possible effects of negative body image on the health and well-being of young people. The first part of the chapter examines the possible linkages between negative body image and the development of medical and psychological problems among young people. The final section looks at these problems in more detail.

The fourth chapter focuses on the treatments recommended and available in Victoria for those children and adolescents suffering the most severe impact of negative body image. The first section discusses the treatment options for eating disorders. The second section focuses on the treatment services available in Victoria, issues of accessibility and the experience of sufferers and their carers.

The final chapter reviews the role of health promotion in preventing the development of body dissatisfaction in young people and ameliorating its effects. It begins by defining health promotion and describing its activities. The structure of health promotion in Victoria is then briefly described. The next section reviews how health promotion works to prevent the development of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders and examines

Victorian, interstate and overseas programs. The last section is concerned with early intervention and how Victorian, interstate and overseas programs work to treat emerging health issues and prevent the development of more serious mental and physical conditions.

During the course of this Inquiry the Committee held hearings in both rural and metropolitan Victoria and received testimony and submissions from a wide range of people from health professionals to community workers, psychologists to concerned members of the public. The Committee also received submissions from interstate and overseas. The Committee would like to thank everyone for their participation.

Although no one should be singled out for their contribution to this report, the Committee would like to recognise the bravery of the sufferers of eating disorders and their families who testified and sent submissions to the Committee stressing the urgent need for solutions. The Committee hopes that this report goes some way to addressing the issues they highlighted and contributing to further the health and well being of young Victorians.

Mr Robert Smith, MLC

Chairman

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: That the State Government dedicate funding for the establishment of an Australian centre for research into body image and eating disorders. Funding should also be sought from the federal government, other state and territories and philanthropic organisations. Such a centre would consist of a board of recognised experts and a Victorian lead agency to coordinate the distribution of funds. A key principle of the centre would be to leverage greater research efforts into body image and eating disorders, with a particular emphasis on current gaps in knowledge and research including-

- bullying and teasing;
- sexual abuse;
- family breakdown;
- obsessive and compulsive behaviour;
- peer influence; and
- risk factors

The Committee also believes that there needs to be more research conducted into male body image problems.

Chapter 3

Recommendation #2: That the Centre for Excellence in Eating Disorders be assisted in its production of professional development and training programs for health and allied health professionals, and for counsellors working with youth.

Chapter 3

Recommendation #3: That a code of conduct for the media industry be developed, recognising the media's social responsibility to display images that are representative of the community. The Committee further recommends that this be developed in consultation with advertisers, media owners and government; such consultation should involve discussions and negotiations between federal, state and territory governments and between the federal government and industry.

Chapter 2

Finding #1: That there is low-level cross-sectoral awareness of programmes and services focusing on body image and eating disorders.

Chapter 4

Finding #2: The Committee finds that services for eating disorders patients in Victoria vary widely in their accessibility, availability and type of care provided to patients and their carers. This variation is most pronounced for Victorians living in rural and regional areas.

Chapter 4

Recommendation #4: That Community Health Centres are utilised more effectively for the delivery of body image programs.

Chapter 4

Recommendation #5: That the Department of Human Services undertake a state-wide mapping exercise of eating disorder services, including patterns of use and demand. The results should be disseminated to all service providers and inform future government policy and funding.

Chapter 4

Recommendation #6: The Committee recommends that a day centre proposal be developed as a community-based initiative designed to address a serious service gap in the public health treatment of young adolescents recovering from severe eating disorders.

Chapter 4

Recommendation #7: That dedicated funding be available to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for eating disorder specific programs.

Chapter 4

Finding #3: The Committee finds that a 'one size fits all' approach to the treatment of eating disorders does not adequately cater for the needs of all young sufferers of eating disorders.

Chapter 4

Recommendation #8: The Committee recommends that the Department of Human Services works together with the Department of Health and Ageing to establish a trial of the Karolinska Institute treatment method for eating disorders in Victoria.

Chapter 4

Recommendation #9: The Committee recommends the formation of a standing Community Reference Group, easily accessible to the general community, with representation from health and allied health professionals, service providers, consumers and carers, to monitor, inform and make recommendations to the government on issues of body image and eating disorders.

Chapter 4

Finding #4: That whole-of-school programs that teach and promote physical wellness and self-esteem in primary students result in improvements in student wellbeing and learning.

Chapter 5

Recommendation #10: That the Department of Education, with the Department of Human Services and in partnership with schools, undertake a program of evaluation, monitoring and implementation of whole-of-school health promotion in primary schools.

The Committee notes the success of programs such as those implemented at Clifton Springs Primary School and Karingal Primary School. It also notes the success of health promotion programs such as the Gatehouse Project in secondary schools in building resilience and self esteem. It therefore recommends particular programs that target the following areas be the focus of evaluation and implementation:

- whole-of-school health promotion;
- healthy eating;
- physical activity; and
- resilience and self-esteem.

Chapter 5

Recommendation #11: That Eating Disorder Awareness Week be part of a broader program of health promotion in body image.

Chapter 5

Recommendation #12: That the Department of Education consider the development and promotion of programs that develop skills in media literacy within the current English curriculum for primary and secondary school students.

Chapter 5

