
Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood

Children's Coalition: IOM Panel Lacks Objectivity

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For Immediate Release

The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood is challenging the objectivity of the Institute of Medicine's of the National Academies upcoming "Workshop on Marketing Strategies that Foster Healthy Food and Beverage Choices in Children and Youth". The January 27, 2005 workshop will feature marketers from Kraft, General Mills, Pepsico and McDonalds, as well as television and advertising executives, all of who have a vested interest in marketing junk food to children. Only one of the workshop's ten participants, the Kaiser Foundation's Victoria Rideout, has been publicly critical of the food industry's marketing practices.

"It is disappointing that a prestigious and influential medical organization would rely so heavily on industry perspectives," said Harvard Psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint of the Judge Baker Children's Center in Boston, who noted that no medical doctors were among the panelists. "A panel on which the majority of participants earn their livelihood from child-directed advertising is going to start with the assumption marketers have the right to target children. But if we are serious about tackling childhood obesity, we need to first consider the right of parents to raise healthy children."

Food marketing is a factor in childhood obesity. A number of prominent organizations – such as the World Health Organization and the American Academy of Pediatrics – have called for restrictions on junk food marketing to children. In response, several food companies and advertising agencies, including IOM presenters Kraft and General Mills, recently formed the Alliance for American Advertising to deflect government regulation of food marketing.

But regulation might be necessary. "We need to ask what is best for children - and the answer may very well be to stop undermining parental authority by marketing directly to kids," said Dr. Michael Brody of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. "It is unlikely, however, that this industry-favored panel will seriously consider that option."

The Campaign For A Commercial-Free Childhood (formerly Stop Commercial Exploitation of Children) is a national coalition of health care professionals, educators, advocacy groups and concerned parents who counter the harmful effects of marketing to children through action, advocacy, education, research, and collaboration among organizations and individuals who care about children. On March 11-13, 2005, CCFC will hold its fourth annual summit: Consuming Kids: How Marketing Undermines Children's Health, Values & Behavior at Howard University in Washington, DC. For more information, please visit www.commercialfreechildhood.org