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Australian Medical Bodies Push for Compulsory Health Star Labelling

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Leading public health organisations have called on Australiaâ??s food ministers to make Health Star Ratings mandatory on all eligible packaged foods, arguing that the current voluntary system has failed to deliver on its intended public health goals.

In a joint letter ahead of this weekâ??s Food Ministersâ?? Meeting, signatories including the Australian Medical Association, VicHealth and The George Institute for Global Health urged ministers to strengthen Australiaâ??s food labelling framework by mandating the government-regulated Health Star Rating (HSR) system.

The Health Star Rating scheme converts detailed nutrition panel information into a simple front-of-pack score ranging from half a star to five stars, enabling consumers to compare products within a category at a glance. However, more than a decade after its introduction as a voluntary initiative, the labels appear on just over one-third of packaged products, well below the governmentâ??s target of 70 per cent uptake by November 2025.

Health leaders argue that inconsistent adoption has limited the schemeâ??s effectiveness. According to Associate Professor Alexandra Jones, Program Lead for Food Governance at The George Institute for Global Health, food manufacturers have often displayed Health Star Ratings selectively on higher-scoring products, leaving lower-rated items unlabelled.

â??Mandatory labelling would close that loophole and ensure Australians get the same easy-to-understand information on every product, not just the ones companies choose to highlight,â?• she said.

Australian Medical Association President Dr Danielle McMullen described mandatory Health Star Ratings as an evidence-based measure to address rising diet-related disease.

â??Clear, front-of-pack labelling like Health Star Ratings allows busy Australians to see how healthy a product is at a glance,â?• Dr McMullen said. â??With diet-related diseases placing growing pressure on our health system, mandating Health Star Ratings is a simple step that will support better nutrition across the community.â?•

VicHealth CEO Professor Anna Peeters AM added that mandatory labelling would help establish a consistent and trusted baseline for packaged food transparency, contributing to long-term chronic disease prevention and easing strain on the healthcare system.

Public health advocates also point to strong consumer backing for reform. Research indicates that 82 per cent of Australians support making Health Star Ratings mandatory, while 66 per cent believe compulsory implementation would increase the schemeâ??s usefulness.

The coalition is calling on food ministers to introduce mandatory Health Star Ratings on all eligible packaged foods without further delay and to set a clear implementation timeline, arguing that comprehensive front-of-pack labelling is a critical lever in building a healthier national food environment.