

Institute of Medicine statement
Jennifer A. Gootman

Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to provide an overview of the Institute of Medicine's report on Food Marketing to Children and Youth. Against the backdrop of pressing public concern over the rapid and widespread increase in the prevalence of childhood obesity, Congress, through the FY2004 Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee appropriation, directed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to undertake a study of the role that marketing of food and beverages may play in determining the nutrition of children and youth, and how marketing approaches might be marshaled to remedy poor nutrition and diets. The CDC turned to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies and the IOM formed the Committee on Food Marketing and the Diets of Children and Youth to conduct a study focused on food marketing and diets. As has been mentioned today, the committee's report, *Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?* was issued in December 2005. It is one of several recent reports from the Institute of Medicine on obesity prevention and children, most notably *Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance*, congressionally mandated and issued in September 2005, and *Progress in Preventing Childhood Obesity: How Do We Measure Up?* released in October 2006. Both of those reports highlighted the urgent need for attention to obesity in children and for multi-sectoral approaches to addressing it.

The food marketing committee was comprised of unusually varied experience and perspective. The 16 members brought to the committee expertise not only in child and adolescent development, public health, and nutrition, but also in food production, marketing, children's television, causal reasoning, constitutional law, and business ethics.

This report likely represents the most comprehensive review ever undertaken of the scientific literature on the influence of marketing on the diets of children. In conducting our study, the committee developed and applied a rigorous analytic framework to the systematic review of the relevant scientific literature. We also undertook an extensive review of the nutritional status of and trends for children and youth, what is known about the full range of factors that influence the

dietary patterns of this population, the broad and evolving food and beverage marketing environment, and policy measures that could improve the nutrition of young people.

You probably will not find it surprising that the report confirmed the evidence that the health of many children and youth is in jeopardy. Health trends show increases in children and youth who are obese or at risk for obesity, and those who have type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome. The diets of children and youth depart from recommended patterns and reflect behaviors that place their health at risk. Young people have higher than recommended intakes of sugar, sodium, and saturated fats, are not meeting daily recommendations for whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and have shown general increases over time in calories and carbohydrates.

The report acknowledged that there are a variety of factors that shape food and beverage consumption, however our focus was on the relationship between marketing and diets and health of children and youth.

I want to highlight several of the report's findings.

First, food preferences develop very early and are shaped by a child's early experiences, positive or negative conditioning, exposure to foods, and a biological predisposition to prefer sweet, high-fat, and salty foods.

Second, there is strong evidence that television advertising of foods and beverages has a direct influence on what children choose to eat. Related to this, children are aware of food brands as young as 2–3 years of age and pre-schoolers demonstrate brand recognition when cued by spokescharacters and colored packages. Likewise, children do not understand the persuasive intent of commercial messages before ages of 7-8 years.

Third, the dominant focus of food and beverage marketing to children and youth is for products high in calories and low in nutrients, and this is sharply out of balance with healthful diets. As well, the report found that new food and beverage offerings targeted specifically at young people were introduced at a substantially faster rate than products aimed at other age groups. This reflects

to some extent the growing purchasing power of children and youth, now more than \$200 billion annually. For instance, the top four items that children ages 8 to 12 say they can buy without parental permission are high calorie and low nutrient foods and beverages.

Fourth, marketing approaches have become multifaceted and sophisticated, moving far beyond television advertising to include a broad, complex, sophisticated, and integrated set of strategies and activities, including the Internet, school and sports settings, advergames, strategic product placement, toys, and much more.

Finally, turning around the current trends in children's diets and in marketing will require strong and active leadership and cooperation, from both the public and private sectors. Industry resources and creativity must be harnessed on behalf of healthier diets for children. The report echoes Commissioner Copps remarks that media and advertising, as well as food and beverage products directed to children and youth provides an opportunity to creatively influence the health and diets of children and youth. The report makes recommendations to a diverse set of stakeholders and highlights the importance of an "all hands on deck" approach.

Constructive steps that some food, beverage, entertainment, and broadcast companies, many of which are represented by those of you here, have recently taken to develop and promote healthier choices for children is what is required given that the turnaround required is so substantial and the issues so complex. We are encouraged by the initiation of this task force, and support the full involvement and leadership of the food, beverage, entertainment, advertising, and broadcast industries, working with government, scientific, academic, advocacy, and public health groups, to develop and enforce marketing standards for healthful foods and beverages, for marketing of products, and for a sustained public-private cooperative social marketing effort aimed at achieving better diets among our children.

Thank you Senator Brownback, Chairman Martin, Commissioner Copps, and Commissioner Tate for your hard work and the initiation of this task force. The Institute of Medicine is willing to be helpful in whatever way identified as this important activity moves forward.