

Important health information missing in online food delivery menus

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A University of Sydney study investigating menu items on major online food delivery outlets and applications (apps) in Australia has found most advertised items are missing nutritional information that would

otherwise help consumers make healthy choices. The findings were published in *Public Health Nutrition*.

Researchers say the findings show this information is largely absent or poorly provided on online food retail platforms and menu labeling laws need to keep up with increasing demand of online food [delivery](#) services.

The 2011 [New South Wales Menu Labeling Scheme](#) require large fast-food outlets to display both the average energy content (as Kilojoules) on [menu items](#) and the reference statement 'the average daily energy intake is 8,700 kJ' at point of sale.

The kilojoule value must be next to the price of each item on menus: in store, at drive-throughs, on internet ordering sites, and distributed via letterboxes. For example, if a burger on a menu item provides 2,058 kJ.

The definition of large food outlets are franchises or chains with more than 20 locations in the state or 50 locations nationally.

From 10 randomly selected suburbs across Sydney, the study reviewed 43 unique large food outlets on online food delivery services.

A total of 482 menus from UberEats, Menulog and Deliveroo were reviewed.

Less than 6% of menus of food outlets on third party online food delivery applications (apps) such as UberEats, Menulog and Deliveroo had complete kilojoule labeling (where all items on the menu had kilojoule labeling). Since the study, Deliveroo no longer operates in Australia.

There were also large inconsistencies in kilojoule labeling between different locations for the same franchise store and between the type of

delivery service, whether it was in house company owned apps (e.g. Dominos) or third-party delivery services (e.g. UberEats).

"The results are concerning and highlight the largely unregulated digital environment where young people increasingly use apps to make food purchases," says lead author and Ph.D. Candidate Sisi Jia, from the Charles Perkins Center and Susan Wakil School of Nursing and Midwifery at the University of Sydney.

"Displaying the kilojoule content on a menu item is important to help people make informed health choices. There are multiple studies that show menu labeling having real-world impact—that consumers who were provided with nutritional information selected meals with significantly lower energy content,

"Although there is increasing demand of food delivery services, it is unknown how well menu labeling is implemented by [online platforms](#)."

"To our knowledge, there are currently no public health policies or nutritional labeling requirements that specifically cover online food delivery platforms."

Key findings

- Large food outlets on UberEats, Menulog and Deliveroo were found to have only 4.8%, 5.3% and 3.6% complete nutritional labeling respectively.
- Only 35% of large fast-food franchise outlets on company apps such as MyMaccas had complete kilojoule labeling.
- Over 75% of menu items from mid-sized food outlets (that had more than five locations across the state) could be classified as 'unhealthy' under independent guidelines although exempt from providing [nutritional information](#) under current laws.

NSW Menu labeling laws need to be updated to reflect rise of online food delivery

Use of online food delivery services [has grown rapidly](#), including during the COVID-19 pandemic. [In 2022](#), two-fifths of people in Australian capital cities were using those services and the primary users were millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) and Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012).

The researchers say current NSW menu labeling laws were written with traditional food environments in mind and need to be updated.

"The inconsistent kilojoule labeling on online food delivery services, shows we need swift and clear leadership on how the NSW Menu Labeling scheme and any future schemes are applied on online food retail platforms," says Dr. Stephanie Partridge from the Charles Perkins Center and Susan Wakil School of Nursing and Midwifery.

[A previous study](#) found over 80 percent of popular menu items advertised were classified as discretionary, meaning they are high in added salt, saturated fat, added sugar or low in [dietary fiber](#) according to the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

Online food delivery is also making it easier for people to buy food of low nutritional quality, say the researchers.

Co-author Dr. Alice Gibson from the Menzies Center for Health Policy and Economics and The Charles Perkins Center said [over 35% of children's diets](#) in Australia are comprised of discretionary junk foods which may increase risk of chronic diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

"One of the aims of the [2021–2030 National Preventive Health Strategy](#) is to improve access to and the consumption of a healthy diet," says Dr. Gibson.

"Food delivery services are a convenient service in response to consumer demand. The way we access food has become more 'digital'—public health nutrition policies need to keep up."

More information: Sophia Cassano et al, Benchmarking online food delivery applications against menu labelling laws: a cross-sectional observational analysis, *Public Health Nutrition* (2024). [DOI: 10.1017/S1368980024000673](#)

Provided by University of Sydney

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