

# Report on the monitoring of the implementation of the Health Star Rating system: Key findings for Area of Enquiry 2 – Consumer awareness and ability to use the Health Star Rating system correctly

**Prepared for the Commonwealth Department of Health**

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For a copy of the full report, please contact the Front-of-Pack Labelling Secretariat

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# Executive summary

## Context and background

The Health Star Rating (HSR) system is a front of pack labelling (FoPL) system that rates the overall nutritional profile of packaged foods to assist consumers in making informed food purchases. It was introduced in June 2014, with participation voluntary.

To monitor the implementation of the HSR system, and evaluate its impact, the Department of Health has engaged the Heart Foundation, leveraging its comprehensive food database, FoodTrack™.

The monitoring is broken into three areas of enquiry:

1. Label implementation and consistency with the HSR system Style Guide
2. Consumer awareness and ability to use the HSR system correctly
3. Nutrient status of products carrying a HSR system label.

The focus of this report is on area of enquiry 2 (AoE2): Consumer awareness and ability to use the HSR system correctly. The objective of AoE2 is to monitor and track consumer awareness, attitudes and interaction with the HSR system, with a national survey of Australian households.

The survey has been undertaken at least twice per year since September 2015, with each survey exploring:

- General supermarket shopping behaviour;
- Awareness of food logos;
- Knowledge and understanding of the HSR system;
- Purchasing behaviour;
- Awareness and influence of advertising; and
- Attitudes and perception of the HSR system.

This report presents the most recent findings from a consumer awareness survey, undertaken during December 2017, and January, February and March 2018.

## Key findings

Almost one in five respondents were able to recall the HSR logo unprompted (18 percent). While this is still behind the Heart Foundation Tick (22 percent), and 'Australian made' (20 percent), awareness of the HSR system has grown substantially since it was implemented in 2014.

Prompted, the HSR logo is the most well recognised, with 84 percent of respondents aware of the HSR system. This is a significant increase since September 2015, when just 53 percent of respondents were aware of the HSR system.

Young, female, and those in a healthy weight range are more likely to be aware of the HSR system than those older, male or overweight/obese respondents.

## Interpreting the HSR system

The majority of people correctly understand that the HSR system is a rating or guide to the healthiness of a product (58 percent), and helps consumers to identify healthier food options within the same food category (71 percent). Consumers also understand that the more stars a product has, the healthier it is, relative to other food items.

However, some respondents believe the HSR can be used across food categories. This indicates that while consumers have a good general understanding of how to interpret the HSR, they don't have such a strong grasp on the nuances of the system.

### HSR and purchasing behaviour

Seventy percent of respondents have bought a HSR product in the last 3 months, with 46 percent saying they 'always' or 'most of the time' include a HSR product in their shopping basket.

Younger persons, males, and those in a healthy weight range are more likely to have purchased a HSR product.

When shopping, 67 percent of respondents reported being influenced by the HSR system in their purchasing decision, which is consistent with the previous three surveys (March, July and November 2017). Of the people influenced, 35 percent were influenced to buy a product with more stars.

Interestingly there has been a decrease in the proportion of respondents who believe the HSR will influence their future purchasing decision: in September 2015 72 percent of respondents stated they would be influenced by HSR in future purchases, which has fallen to 52 percent.

### Awareness and influence of HSR advertising

Over one in five (21 percent) of respondents recall hearing, seeing or reading any advertising or promotion of the HSR system, which is a small, but statistically significant increase since November 2017.

For those that do recall HSR advertising, 75 percent were influenced to buy a product that they wouldn't normally. This indicates that advertising is powerful when it reaches the consumer.

### Attitudes and perceptions of the HSR system

The majority of respondents have a positive view of the HSR system, with 59 percent of respondents agreeing that the system is trustworthy, credible (63 percent), reliable (61 percent) and open and transparent (58 percent).

Overall, the majority of respondents believe the system is easy to use (76 percent), understand (76 percent), and makes choosing food easier (63 percent).

Two-thirds of respondents reported that their confidence in the system is high, or somewhat high (66 percent).

#### *Increasing trust in the HSR*

In this survey additional questions were included to further explore community trust in the HSR and identify what type of activities could increase people's trust in the HSR.

The most common rationale for lack of trust in the HSR was that the system is not accurate or is misleading (36 percent), that they don't agree with how some foods are rated (21 percent) and the manufacturer pays for or manipulates the system (18 percent).

The views of respondents were sought on what could be done to increase their trust in the HSR. The majority of respondents stated that providing greater explanation of how stars are calculated would be beneficial (63 percent), along with greater endorsement from nutritionists and dietitians (53 percent) and government (38 percent).

However, the majority of respondents (70 percent) understood they could source additional information from the HSR website, or a dietitian or nutritionist (24 percent).