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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, ABC Radio Melbourne, *Mornings with Jon Faine*, Tuesday 26 June 2018

Subject: Obesity and sugary drinks

JON FAINE: The Health Minister, Greg Hunt, fronted up to a press conference together with representatives of the soft drinks industry to reassure us all that they would voluntarily cut sugar in their drinks, and there was no need for the much talked about sugar tax. But the backlash has been enormous.

Tony Bartone is President of the AMA, the doctors' union, I'll call it. The doctors' representative organisation. Dr Bartone, good morning to you.

TONY BARTONE: Good morning, Jon.

JON FAINE: Are you convinced by the Beverages Council's promise to voluntarily reduce sugar in soft drinks?

TONY BARTONE: Look, I'm far from convinced. And in fact, I'm slightly sceptical of the proposal, you might say. First of all, the proposal talks about 2025. Seven years is far too long a period, far too down into the future to really be of any benefit today. We've got a problem today, it's a crisis, an epidemic. We need to do something now. This proposal is about reducing the sugar content across a range of products as an average, but the main products, the product line particular leaders are still going to have the same content of sugar. So, in a 600 mil bottle of one of the leading brands of soft drink, you're going to have 14 teaspoons of sugar still in there. That's far, far too much sugar, far too much. No nutritional value in these soft drinks and really does nothing to address the significant level of obesity and the amount of concern about overweight people in our community at this present time.

JON FAINE: Is this not straight out of the playbook used by all sorts of other industries that have got embarrassing secrets, whether it's tobacco, even asbestos, and so on. You claim to have put your own house in order and said: no need for any intervention or mandatory regulator or any other interference in our business. Go away, leave us alone, we've got this under control.

TONY BARTONE: I couldn't have said it better myself. [Indistinct].

JON FAINE: [Interrupts] And we're surely aware- that's- some PR company, I can't remember the names of them, but they go around the world peddling this solution to corporate crises.

TONY BARTONE: And Jon, the reason we're calling it out is because what we've seen in other parts and other jurisdictions is that there's been the need to be some form of public health education about the reduction in the consumption, but also a signal at the point of sale to say: do I really want to buy this product which has no nutritional value, is exceedingly bad for me, and is the cause of a lot of health problems for our community? And that's a sugar tax, and that's what we've seen- been working in Mexico, in 'US of A', in many countries in Europe, and that's what really needs to happen here. And this announcement yesterday, I believe, is just an attempt to try and hopefully get in before some of the ongoing positive pressure that's being

exerted at the moment to get them to change their formulations and get them to make some significant inroads in this area.

JON FAINE: But just- in the same ways, you can hardly not know about the harmful effects of tobacco, you could hardly not know about the harmful effects of excessive consumption of alcohol, you could hardly not know about the harmful effect of the excessive consumption of soft drink, could you?

TONY BARTONE: Well look, unfortunately, I'm still being asked questions, and I'm surprised by the level of the obesity crisis in Australia, and surprised by the extent to which we're really suffering and have the ongoing health issues. And in general, the health literacy around this still needs significant action and needs significant resources and needs significant attention on behalf of the community, trying to understand that the real burden both to the community, but to their own future health.

JON FAINE: Thank you.

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