



News

Body image campaign not working

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Like millions of young women in Australia, 17-year-old students Flo Munday and Amanda Hawkes say they feel the pressure of having to live up to unrealistic images of women in advertisements, magazines and photographs.

And like a growing number of their peers, they also say they want the fashion, media and advertising industries to stop selling them unachievable images and eroding their confidence and self-esteem.

However, a Federal Government campaign to tackle negative body image among young Australians — specifically by targeting fashion, media and advertising — is simply not working, according to leading women's advocates.

Last June, former youth minister Kate Ellis promised “genuine progress” on the health and wellbeing of young people, announcing a body image friendly awards scheme, issuing body image friendly ticks of approval to organisations promoting positive body image and a voluntary code of conduct for the fashion, advertising and media industries.

Nine months later, a spokesman for current minister Peter Garrett said work was continuing on the development of the scheme and the body image friendly symbol. He said the code of conduct had been successful in providing national guidance and raising awareness and stimulating debate.

“It is a meaningless code with awards that haven't happened and a tick of approval none of us has seen,” author and women's advocate Melinda Tankard-Reist said.

“The code is voluntary, has no teeth, there are no penalties and there appears to be no meaningful progress at all, aside from the occasional token gestures like a special edition of a magazine using larger girls.”

Youth self-esteem expert and author Dannielle Miller, from Enlightened Education, called for a compulsory code of conduct and for women to support the Equality Rights Alliance's campaign pressing Mr Garrett to implement the code by 2012.

Ms Tankard-Reist said media literacy was crucial but strong regulatory codes had to be part of the solution.



Media pressure: Flo Munday, left, and Amanda Hawkes, both 17. Picture: Bill Hatto