

The **Good Practice** Guide

Supporting healthy
eating and drinking
at school

Vision

All Australian schools have a healthy food and drink culture that maximises student wellbeing and achievement.

Introduction

Australian children are growing up in an environment where food and drink high in added sugars, saturated fat and added salt are readily available, heavily promoted and perceived as low cost. Most Australian children, from as young as two years old, are consuming too many of these unhealthy foods and drinks – these dietary patterns continue into adulthood and are inconsistent with [Australian Dietary Guidelines](#).

This trend results in the low intake of essential nutrients, poor oral health, sub-optimal educational performance and a higher risk of children being overweight or obese. These outcomes are preventable and disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children in lower socioeconomic groups and children living in regional and remote areas. With one quarter of Australian children aged 5 to 17 years now overweight or obese, and more than one third of children's total energy (kilojoules) coming from unhealthy food and drink, urgent national action is required to address these unhealthy habits and prevent the development of poor physical and mental health.

Action is required across all sectors to create healthier environments and empower individuals to make healthy choices across a range of settings, including schools. Alongside the home, schools play an important role in teaching children and young people the knowledge and skills to support life-long healthy eating. This learning is reinforced and embedded when it occurs in an environment that enables and supports healthy food and drink choices. This is best achieved through a whole-of-school approach. A whole-of-school approach requires:

- leadership to prioritise healthy eating and drinking;
- integration of health into planning and policies;
- students, staff, teachers and families working together; and
- sustained teaching and learning in evidence-based food literacy¹ for staff, students and families across the school years.

Across Australia there are many examples of school communities creating healthy food and drink cultures, however this isn't the case in all schools. *The Good Practice Guide – Supporting Healthy Eating and Drinking at School* (Good Practice Guide) describes evidence informed best-practice approaches for schools and communities to consider in their local environment, making it easier to identify actions that contribute to a healthy food and drink school culture.



¹ food literacy is defined as the tools needed for a healthy lifelong relationship with food

Context

The [World Health Organisation Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity](#) has called for governments and stakeholders to collaboratively deliver comprehensive programs that promote healthy school environments, health and nutrition literacy, and physical activity among school-age children and young people.

In 2016 the Council of Australian Government Health Council endorsed five actions to limit the impact of unhealthy food and drinks on children. Recognising the importance of working with and across sectors, Australian health, sport and recreation, food and agriculture, and education ministers, have committed to collaborative action. Schools, sport and recreation, and public healthcare facilities are the focus of the national initiatives, as well as potential enhancements in food regulation and food promotion systems.

The Good Practice Guide is one component of a three-part national approach to strengthen efforts to support healthy eating at school. It clarifies the actions required to respond to the *Joint statement from the Council of Australian Government Education and Health Councils — Promoting and Supporting Healthy Food and Drink Choices at School* and is backed by quality resources at the Student Wellbeing Hub (www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au).

Purpose

The Good Practice Guide supports school communities to create environments where students are enabled and supported to make informed healthy food and drink choices. The guide identifies actions to achieve this goal. It is relevant for all stakeholders involved in children's wellbeing, including health and education organisations (government and non-government), industry and private business, peak bodies, schools and their staff, students and their families. The Good Practice Guide supports stakeholders involved in the planning, development and implementation of changes aimed at creating healthy food and drink cultures at school. The Good Practice Guide promotes:

- shared ownership between health and education sectors
- agreed approaches endorsed at a state and national level
- clarity about the roles schools and others can play
- flexibility allowing for local decision-making.

In recognition that each school, community and jurisdiction is different, the application and implementation of the Good Practice Guide should be tailored to meet local circumstances, ensuring the goal remains a clear focus. Some schools will require more support than others to achieve the actions, and schools with the greatest need should be identified as a priority. Principles of good practice include adopting a strengths-based approach working towards positive and incremental change. Progress of the Good Practice Guide implementation should be reflected in jurisdiction level monitoring and evaluation in line with local processes and priorities.

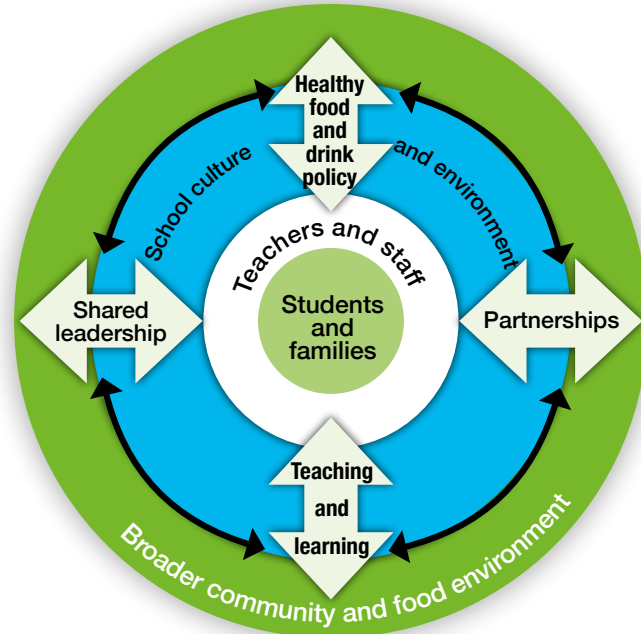


Pillars of good practice

The four Good Practice pillars² are:

- shared leadership
- healthy food and drink policy
- teaching and learning
- partnerships.

The pillars are interdependent and act together to achieve the Good Practice Guide goal. Within each pillar there is a series of actions to guide schools and their community towards continual improvement practices. The school community may include parents, carers and families, local government and local business services, parent groups, and health and community organisations. Schools and their communities are part of the broader environment that includes government, non-government organisations and the private sector. Actions by these groups will support schools and influence community sentiment around healthy food and drink cultures.



1. Shared leadership

Strong leadership, commitment and collaboration are required across the education and health sectors to build and sustain a healthy food and drink culture and environment in schools. State and territory education and health departments, peak bodies for Catholic, independent and government schools, and health services all have a shared responsibility to establish clear and relevant goals and focus their efforts.

Action for schools

School leaders play a powerful role in the promotion of healthy eating. Together, principals and staff have the opportunity to establish a positive culture, model healthy eating, teach students about food and nutrition through the curriculum, expose students and their families to healthy, tasty and appealing food and drink at school events and in the school food environment.

Schools should:

- commit to promoting healthy eating and drinking through defined action and priorities in school plans and relevant policy
- support and encourage school staff, parents and community members to model healthy eating and drinking behaviours within the school environment, consistent with *Australian Dietary Guidelines*
- engage and encourage students as leaders and innovators in healthy eating and drinking at school, to lead and actively participate in healthy eating initiatives
- encourage all school staff and volunteers who work with students to avoid using food as a reward
- prevent unhealthy food and drink sponsorship and marketing in school canteens and at school-related activities, including fundraising, excursions and camps, sporting events, fetes and cooking activities



² The Good Practices pillars are consistent with two key directions from the World Health Organization, the Health Promoting Schools Framework and the 2017 Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity: implementation plan. They also support food and drink choices consistent with the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

- support and encourage staff to expand their professional knowledge and skills in food literacy through professional development
- ensure healthy options are available when food and drink is provided at staff meetings, parent meetings and professional development sessions
- support parent organisations and community groups to include healthy food and drink options whenever food and drink is provided at school events.

Action for others

Government, with support of the broader community, should:

- prioritise ongoing education and health collaboration that provides expertise and evidence-based resources for schools to implement healthy eating initiatives
- provide professional development for school leaders and staff to extend their food literacy knowledge and skills, further integrate healthy eating and drinking in schools and improve student wellbeing
- prioritise support for schools in disadvantaged areas , including rural and remote areas and identify the support required to overcome known barriers
- determine the best way to monitor and communicate state and territory based learnings and successes about the healthy food and drink culture in schools in their jurisdiction
- consider the cross-agency opportunities to assess and address community concerns such as unhealthy food advertising close to schools, on public transport and at sporting facilities.

2. Healthy food and drink policy

The development, implementation, communication, monitoring and review of policies remains an important engagement process for schools, staff, students and their families, and provides an opportunity to clearly articulate expectations for school specific settings and contexts.

Action for schools

Schools should promote an environment and culture of healthy eating and drinking through the provision and promotion of healthy food and drink choices at school and for all school activities consistent with *Australian Dietary Guidelines*.

Schools should:

- implement a healthy food and drink policy within a broader wellbeing policy (this may comprise a commitment to a state and territory level policy or program) that is developed in consultation with students, their families and the community, and reviewed regularly
- ensure their food and drink policies and programs specifically address:
 - increasing the supply of healthy food and drink
 - limiting supply of unhealthy food and drink
 - ensuring palatable drinking water is available for students at all times and drinking tap water is promoted, including during sports activities



- encouraging healthy food, drinks and water bottles to be brought from home
- providing students and staff with designated and inviting spaces to sit down and eat
- providing students with allocated and adequate time to eat
- using non-food items as rewards or incentives for students
- representing the cultural diversity of both the local school community and the broader community
- preventing sponsorship and promotion of school-related events and activities (e.g. sports) by unhealthy food products or by companies or associated brands selling these products
- preventing display of marketing collateral on school grounds that promotes or advertises unhealthy food and drink options (such as signage in canteens or advertising on water bottles).
- ensure their healthy food and drink policies are embedded in contracts with food providers
- ensure their food and drink policies encompass the range of school activities, celebrations and settings where food and drink are supplied in the school environment – canteens, vending machines, fundraising activities, school excursions and camps, sporting events, outside school hours care, fetes, nutrition programs, cooking activities, graduations, classroom rewards, breakfast programs, staff and parent meetings
- nominate program champions, including students, teachers and community members to promote and communicate the policy
- apply their healthy food and drink policies to agreements with external organisations who use school facilities and provide activities to students and the community– for example, swim clubs, out of school hours care.

Action for others

Government, with support of the broader community, should:

- establish state and territory healthy food and drink policies for schools that are informed by consultation, implemented and regularly updated, monitored and reported
- regularly communicate state and territory policy through departmental/organisation level correspondence and communication
- provide accessible and affordable tools and resources to assist schools to implement and monitor healthy food and drink policies, such as healthy fundraising ideas, school or community garden information, sample canteen menus and recipes.

3. Teaching and learning

The Australian Curriculum addresses learning about food and wellbeing from foundation to Year 10. It develops students' knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to their health, wellbeing, safety and participation in physical activity. The curriculum provides the foundation for students to understand personal, social, economic and cultural influences on food choices and eating habits, how to make healthy informed food choices and explore the contextual factors that influence eating habits and food choices. Schools require practical information on how to incorporate healthy eating and drinking into the curriculum to build food literacy.

Action for schools

Schools should:

- support staff and volunteers with professional development opportunities to facilitate implementation of their local food and drink policies
- support staff to deliver explicit food and nutrition education aligned with the Australian Curriculum including in Health and Physical Education and Food Technologies and Science
- use a range of formal, informal and varied teaching strategies linked to the curriculum to embed and reinforce healthy eating and drinking behaviours such as cooking programs, use of community gardens and supermarket label reading activities
- source and promote quality resources to support curriculum delivery that focus on healthy eating and drinking, including those available on the [Student Wellbeing Hub](#).

Action for others

Government, with support of the broader community, should:

- strengthen preservice teacher training and deliver ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to facilitate:
 - an understanding of health promotion approaches and the importance of health promoting environments (e.g. Health Promoting Schools Framework)
 - increased knowledge and skills to build students' food literacy
 - delivery of evidence-based food and nutrition educational content consistent with *Australian Dietary Guidelines*.

This equips teachers to embed and reinforce healthy eating and drinking behaviours in the classroom and wider school environment and in so doing, enhance student learning.

4. Partnerships

Fostering partnerships between students, educators, families, the community, state and local government, non-government organisations and local businesses assists in the expansion of healthy food and drink knowledge, skills, resources and opportunities available to schools and students.

Action for schools

Schools should:

- network, share learnings and provide support around shifting the balance towards healthier food and drink environments including with other schools
- access support from a range of local community organisations, businesses, universities, non-government and government organisations to develop, implement and update their local healthy food and drink policy, programs and initiatives
- actively consult with and support the needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds when planning and implementing healthy eating and drinking initiatives and activities in partnership with their families and communities
- regularly communicate healthy eating and drinking policy goals and expectations to the community and partners
- involve students, staff and families in the development and implementation of healthy food and drink initiatives and policy, for example, establish a canteen committee involving the school executive, teachers, parent group representatives and students
- invite and encourage families to partner in their children's learning by reinforcing healthy food and drink behaviours at home and contributing to school-based efforts, such as healthy fundraising events
- work in partnership with experts (e.g. dietitians, master teacher) and relevant organisations to develop critical food literacy knowledge needed for a healthy, lifelong relationship with food and drink.

Actions for others

Government, with the support of the broader community, should:

- form, facilitate and establish collaborative partnerships across sectors to support and advocate for healthier food and drink environments in schools and surrounding school areas
- strengthen and support the ability of schools to work with and empower parents through policy, frameworks and resourcing
- provide guidance for schools to develop partnerships that support healthy food and drink policy and address any potential conflicts of interest
- engage experts to assist in the development, planning and implementation of strategies that support healthy food and drink choices in the school environment
- consider the opportunities to work with the food industry, in their jurisdiction, to support and drive healthy product and packaging innovation.





Resources

Student Wellbeing Hub

www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au

Key References

Australian Dietary Guidelines

www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines

National interim guide to reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food and drink promotion

www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Publications/Reports

Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity – WHO

www.who.int/end-childhood-obesity/publications/echo-report/en/

What is a health promoting school? – WHO

www.who.int/school_youth_health/gshi/hps/en/

National Canteen guidelines

www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/phd-nutrition-canteens

Australian Curriculum – Health and Physical Education

www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/health-and-physical-education/

The Good Practice Guide: Supporting healthy eating and drinking at school
Published by COAG Health Council and COAG Education Council, July 2019



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