

**High Level Ministerial Taskforce on Canteens Submission to  
Minister for Education and Training**

**September 2013**

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to report research, findings and outcomes of the High Level Ministerial Taskforce on Canteens to the Minister for Education and Training and provide a number of recommendations to the Minister.

In mid-2012, the then Minister for Education and Training Dr Chris Bourke MLA, agreed to the establishment of a High Level Ministerial Taskforce into ACT public schools canteens. The Taskforce's direction was to provide advice to the Minister for Education and Training on public school canteens in relation to:

1. examining and reporting on strategies to support the sustainability of canteens in ACT public schools, and
2. promoting healthy food options for students and their families.

The Taskforce has taken a collaborative approach in working through these issues. The Chair of the Taskforce is the Executive Director, Corporate Services, ACT Education and Training Directorate. Members of the Taskforce include:

- ACT Education and Training Directorate
- ACT Council of Parents and Citizens' Association
- Nutrition Australia ACT
- ACT Health
- ACT School Canteen Association (ceased operations as of June 2013)
- Healthy Kids Association NSW
- Experts from areas of business and management - at discretion of the Taskforce.

## **Background**

The links between health and education are well established. Healthy children are better able to learn, and higher educational achievement is strongly associated with better health. Schools can play a role in educating children and encouraging them to eat more fruit and vegetables, in part by incorporating the learning into the curriculum and to influence the school environment to provide healthier food choices for students, including via rewards, fundraising and continuing the work with school canteens.

## Current Issues

### National Outlook

The Australian Dietary Guidelines provide evidence based recommendations about the amount and kinds of foods that Australians need to eat for health and wellbeing. These guidelines were updated in 2013. The guidelines apply to all Australians with advice for each stage of life including specific information for healthy eating for children.

The Australian Government commenced the National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines project in 2008 as part of the Australian Better Health Initiative. The project is designed to deliver nationally consistent guidelines to harmonise practice and training across Australia to support canteen managers in the provision of healthier food and drink choices in schools.

The National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines have been embraced within the Council of Australian Government National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health. The ACT Health Directorate and ACT Education and Training Directorate are committed to the National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines project through the work of the ACT Strategic Board Healthy Weight Initiative.

The ACT Government committed \$0.3 million to support the development of the Healthy Weight Initiative which brings action across the Whole of Government to combat obesity and overweight in the ACT. A number of different across Directorate projects within the initiative focus broadly on obesity prevention aiming to impact on both adult and childhood obesity.

As part of the Initiative, the Health and Education and Training Directorates are working closely together to transition the current ACT School Canteen Policy to a new ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy. The initiative aligns key ACT Government-supported healthy eating policies, programs and frameworks in schools, and carries forward the work of the High Level Ministerial Taskforce on Canteens. The new policy will provide consistent advice to schools regarding best practice approaches to healthy food provision in ACT schools. The policy review will be finalised by 2015.

In developing the new policy, an extensive consultation process will identify key stakeholder and community interests and ensure the views of all stakeholders are considered.

Integral to the work will be the inclusion of recommendations provided by the Taskforce and the National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines that all states and territories agreed to implement.

The National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines utilise a traffic light system as follows.

<b>GREEN</b>	<p>Foods and drinks categorised as GREEN are the best choices for the school canteen menu as they contain a wide range of nutrients and are generally low in saturated fat and/or sugar and/or sodium (salt). These foods and drinks should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• available every day</li> <li>• included as the main choices on the canteen menu</li> <li>• presented in attractive and interesting ways</li> <li>• promoted as tasty, good value choices.</li> </ul>
<b>AMBER</b>	<p>Foods and drinks categorised as AMBER contain some valuable nutrients as well, but may also contain higher levels of saturated fat and/or sugar and/or sodium (salt). If eaten in large amounts these foods may contribute to excess energy (kilojoules) being consumed. These foods and drinks should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sold in smaller serve sizes</li> <li>• less prominent on the canteen menu</li> <li>• moved towards the 'GREEN' end of the spectrum at every opportunity.</li> </ul>
<b>RED</b>	<p>Foods and drinks categorised as RED are low in nutritional value and may contain excess energy (kilojoules) and/or saturated fat and/or sodium (salt) and/or sugar. These foods and drinks should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not be provided in healthy school canteens.</li> </ul>

*National Health School Canteens Trainers Manual 2010*

2012 ACT Labor Election Commitments

The Taskforce recognises the ACT Government's commitment to public school canteens continuing to provide healthy, nutritious and affordable food options for students during school hours, and its acknowledgment that canteens can be complex to run and require support to continue to serve school communities.

During the 2012 ACT Election, the ACT Labor Government proposed the following activities in support of canteens.

	<b>2013-14</b> \$m	<b>2014-15</b> \$m	<b>2015-16</b> \$m	<b>2016-17</b> \$m
<b>Water Bottle Refill Stations</b>	0.500	-	-	-
<b>School Canteen Support</b>	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250

The Water Bottle Refill Stations commitment identified that to participate in the program, schools must agree to end the sale of sugary drinks within five years. The transitioning of the current ACT School Canteen Policy to a new ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy will provide increased support to schools in reducing the number of sugary drinks available for sale.

The ACT public school canteen support initiative would fund better support for canteens to deliver healthier options for students and improve canteen sustainability. The aim of the initiative is to encourage further co-ordination across ACT public school canteens to improve the provision of high-quality, healthy food and drink options for students. It would also see the introduction of an online order system and Point of Sale (EFTPOS) terminals.

*The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens' Association*

The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations' own Canteens and the Provision of Food at Schools policy recognises the important place that canteens have in ACT public schools and recognises canteen sustainability as a serious issue. The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations policy states that for a canteen to operate at its most efficient, it must have:

- a Parents and Citizens' Association member who has small business knowledge and is in a position to volunteer considerable hours to oversee the canteen
- a Parents and Citizens' Association member who has knowledge of awards (sometimes other legislation) and appropriate time to volunteer to undertake these tasks
- a Parents and Citizens' Association member prepared to be canteen treasurer, which requires accounting qualifications and/or substantial experience with accounting software
- a highly skilled, appropriately trained and innovative person is employed as the canteen manager
- for high schools and colleges, the school isn't too close to competing retail food outlets, and
- volunteers are available, if required, to assist in the canteen.

While the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations identifies the above membership and skills as valuable in ensuring the operation of a viable school canteen, it recognises that all of these skills are not readily available at each school.

Consultation around the transitioning of the current ACT School Canteen Policy to a new ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy will pay careful consideration to the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations work in this area.

### ACT School Canteen Association

As of 30 June 2013, the ACT Canteen Association ceased operations. The Association has provided to the operators of school canteens, its members, support for their efforts to operate economically viable canteens providing food for students. On ceasing operations, its current, fifty-three, 2013 financial members were transferred to Healthy Kids Association Incorporated and these schools are able to access the services of the Association. In the short term, school nutrition and food related enquiries should be referred to the ACT Health, Healthy Food at School Team.

Healthy Kids Association is a health promotion charity set up to offer advice and support to school communities to provide a healthy canteen. The Association works according to the principles and values articulated in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion and the guiding principles for Health Promoting Schools.

Established in 1991, the aim of the organisation is to promote and influence healthy food choices for children. The goals of Healthy Kids encompass the entire health promoting school community. It is the primary source of advice and information on healthy food choices for 3,000 schools in NSW. The Association has multiple funding sources including from government and membership income. Annual membership for a school costs \$99. Health Kids Association services to member schools include:

- access to a team of professionally qualified staff for advice and support on food, nutrition, and all aspects of canteen operations
- two copies of a quarterly publication are delivered to each member school, covering everything the canteen and school staff need to know about healthy canteens
- Annual Food Exhibition and Training Day provides members with over 40 food stands, cooking demonstrations and education seminars
- scholarships are available to a number of rural members to attend the Expo and Training Day in Sydney
- recipes, menu tips, WHS, volunteers and many more canteen topics are covered.
- tailored help with financial systems and procedures are available. This includes detailed analysis of canteen business systems and revision of finances through the business diagnostic. Advice on Industrial Relations, pay rates, and performance management. Annual Canteen awards in recognition of excellence are valued at \$3000. Winners receive a cash prize for both themselves and their canteen.

### Food Safety

From 1 September 2013, the *Food Act 2001* requires all registered food businesses to appoint a Food Safety Supervisor. Food Safety Supervisors are required to undertake training from an Australian Registered Training Organisation and retain proof of their training. The aim of this requirement is to reduce the burdens associated with food borne

illness through education and supervision. For the purposes of the ACT, school canteens are required to be a registered food business.

All jurisdictions have similar requirements for registration of canteens as a food business and the safe handling of food.

### ACT Health

The ACT Government has signed up to the National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health (NPAPH) until 2018. ACT Health (Health Improvement Branch) is working in partnership with the Education and Training Directorate to deliver a number of programs as part of the ACT Healthy Children's initiative, funded by the Australian Government under the NPAPH.

One of the key activities within the NPAPH Healthy Children's Implementation Plan is the healthy food at school program. The program is designed to support the creation a culture of healthy food and drinks using a whole of school approach. It is an expansion of the former Healthy Food@School program that supports ACT school canteens to implement the National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines.

National and international evidence combined with evaluation outcomes for the former Healthy Food@School program recognised that working in school canteens alone will not make a significant difference to children's health as food and drink consumed by students also comes from other sources and needs to be backed up with education. The implementation of these guidelines to support school canteens to 'green' their menu will be renamed *Canteen Fresh* as one component of the broader healthy food at school program.

ACT Health has contracted Nutrition Australia ACT to implement *Canteen Fresh*, one component of the healthy food at school program, providing ACT school canteens with free access to a nutrition advisory service. The NPAPH funding provides around \$75,000 per annum to Nutrition Australia ACT for this service, for a minimum of two years.

In addition, Nutrition Australia ACT provides the nationally accredited Canteen Managers' Training course. Over recent years, the Education and Training Directorate subsidised the program by fifty per cent. Funding for subsidising the Canteen Manager's Training course has now been assumed by ACT Health as part of the healthy food at school program.

ACT Health Promotion Grants Program

The ACT Health Promotion Grants Program disperses approximately \$2.06 million per annum in grants for community based health promotion activities. Following a recent review and public consultation, a significant proportion of these funds will contribute to children’s healthy weight initiatives and obesity prevention. Schools will have opportunity to apply for funding to support healthy food programs.

ACT Public School’s Canteen Policy

The ACT Education and Training Directorate’s current 2012 School Canteens Policy was designed to support public schools and colleges in promoting nutrition guidelines and recommendations for food and drinks through school canteen services. The ACT Health and Education and Training Directorates will transition the current ACT School Canteen Policy to a new ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy. The new policy will provide consistent advice to schools regarding best practice approaches to healthy food provision in ACT schools. The policy review will be finalised by 2015.

2013-14 ACT Budget

The 2013-14 ACT Budget provided the following funding for canteen and healthy food and drink initiatives in the financial year 2013-14.

	<b>2013-14 \$m</b>	<b>2014-15 \$m</b>	<b>2015-16 \$m</b>	<b>2016-17 \$m</b>
<b>Water Bottle Refill Stations</b>	0.125	0.125	0.125	0.125
<b>School Canteen Support</b>	0.2	0	0	0

The 2013-14 ACT Budget provides \$200,000 for the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations to support school Parents and Citizens Associations to: run canteen services in ACT public schools to promote healthy food choices for students; provide business support to assist school canteens to become financial viable and sustainable; and provide schools with access to an online ordering system.

In addition, the budget provides \$500,000 over four years to provide water refill stations in ACT public schools, as part of the ACT Government's objective to provide and promote improved nutritional options in schools. The Education and Training Directorate is working closely with ACT Health to align this initiative with the healthy food at school program under the National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health, Healthy Children’s Initiative.



*Canteen Sustainability and Healthy Food Options*

It is recognised that in providing healthy food and drink options in school canteens, competing influences such as profit, volunteer support, student support and location can negatively impact on both the operation of a canteen and what is provided on its menu. Concerns have been identified across states and territories about issues surrounding the financial viability and sustainability of school canteens, implementation of the National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines, and decreasing volunteer parent support in canteens. Issues such as proximity to local shops or shopping centres have also been raised as a concern for canteen operators as students purchase their red food before or after school, rather than purchase green or amber food at the school.

In recognition of the research, support for canteens form part of a series of actions in schools supported by ACT Health and Educating and Training Directorate, including a number of action areas within the healthy food at school programs. The strongest measures of a canteens ability to be sustainable and implement healthy food options related to the appropriateness of the chosen business model, unconditional support from the principal and teachers', and parent endorsement of the school's and canteen's commitment to healthy food service. It has also been found that canteens in schools that closely align learning through healthy eating educational opportunities and the provision of healthy food choices in the canteen were able to support more sustainable canteen operations. As a consequence, support provided via the NPAPH healthy food at school program should include support for canteens, the broader school environment and the provision of resources to support student engagement in the curriculum.

Taskforce members support the collaborative approach to improving the promotion of healthy food options in canteens, with members advising that the mandating of healthy food and drink requirements in other jurisdictions had not worked well. All stakeholders agree on the importance of access to nutritional options in school canteens. This shared understanding forms the basis of the work currently being undertaken with school canteen operators and will continue to underpin the ACT Health and Education and Training Directorates development of the new ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy under the ACT Strategic Board's Whole of Government Healthy Weight Initiative .

The viability and access to nutritional menus provided by school canteens is an ongoing challenge for the Directorate and school communities. The healthy food at school program will assist school canteens in the development of menus to increase the prevalence of green healthy options and reduce the presence of red items on school canteen menus

## Recommendations

The High Level Ministerial Taskforce on Canteens recommends the following initiatives to address the issues identified in this report:

1. Supports the ACT Government commitment to deliver the 2013-14 ACT Budget School Canteen Support Initiative, in partnership with the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations, to improve Canteen Sustainability and healthy eating options in ACT public schools.
2. Supports the ACT Government commitment to deliver the 2013-14 ACT Budget Water Bottle Refill Stations initiative to improve access to tap water and support healthy drink options in ACT public schools.
3. As part of the School Canteen Support budget initiative, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations will introduce online ordering to improve ordering options for parents and provide canteens with greater certainty in ordering.
4. Transition the current ACT School Canteen Policy to a new ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy within the ACT Strategic Board's Healthy Weight Initiative.
5. Reflect in the new ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy, the positive effects of having local school Parents and Citizens' Association being provided with the opportunity to operate their local school canteen.
6. The ACT Education and Training Directorate develop and implement a standard contract for schools entering into agreements with school Parent and Citizens' Associations for the operation of a canteen, which includes the need to conduct regular healthy menu reviews to ensure the provision of healthy food choices.
7. The ACT Education and Training Directorate develop and implement a licence contract for schools entering into agreements with non-Parent and Citizens' Associations providers for the operation of a canteen, which includes the need to conduct regular healthy menu reviews.
8. School canteens continue to be encouraged to increase the range and quality of healthy food and drink through positive action and a range of initiatives supported by ACT Health, the ACT Education and Training Directorate, and the ACT Council of Parent and Citizens' Associations.
9. The ACT Council of Parent and Citizens' Associations, ACT Health and Healthy Kids Association will work together to identify mechanisms to support schools to implement sustainable business practices into their canteens to ensure financial viability to deliver healthy food services.
10. Support the continued membership by ACT public school canteens of the Healthy Kids Association.

**References:**

<http://www.nutritionaustralia.org/act/healthy-foodschool>

<http://www.parentsjury.org.au/>

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-nutrition-canteens>

<http://www.actparents.org.au/our-policies/canteens-and-the-provision-of-food-at-schools/>

<https://healthy-kids.com.au/about-us>

<http://her.oxfordjournals.org/content/26/4/739.full.pdf+html>