

OVERVIEW OF SCHOOLS



The purpose of this resource is to provide health promoters with information about schools in Victoria. This overview will equip health promoters with greater knowledge and understanding of the setting, supporting them to work with schools more effectively. In addition, the information provided also includes tips on how best to engage and support schools participating in Vic Kids Eat Well. Vic Kids Eat Well is supported by the Victorian Government, and is delivered by Cancer Council Victoria, in partnership with National Nutrition Foundation.

WHY IS VIC KIDS EAT WELL A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR SCHOOLS?

A great education starts with kids having the energy and focus to learn at school

Students consume over one third of their daily energy intake during school hours.¹ Therefore food and drinks provided within the school environment have significant potential to impact students' nutrition and health. Providing healthy foods can have a positive impact on students' physical health, mood, mental health, learning and academic success.²

Through previous support programs and initiatives, we know that many schools have found it challenging to meet healthy eating best practises. Schools often have competing priorities and many find it overwhelming to make the changes needed to meet the [Canteens, Healthy Eating and Other Food Services Policy](#).³ Vic Kids Eat Well presents an opportunity to better support schools by breaking down this policy into small, simple and achievable bites, with the added support of local health promoters to guide and support schools every step of the way.

VICTORIAN SCHOOLS QUICK FACTS⁴

In July 2021, there were:

2, 276 schools across Victoria

- 68% Government
- 10% Independent
- 22% Catholic
- 69% Primary
- 11% Primary-secondary
- 15% Secondary
- 5% Special schools

1, 014, 247 students enrolled in Victorian schools

- 65% in government schools
- 35% in non-government schools
- 55% primary school students
- 43% secondary school
- 2% in special schools

STUDENTS' EATING HABITS

In 2018, the Victorian Student Health and Wellbeing Survey⁵ found that 67% of students met the Australian Dietary Guidelines for fruit intake. However, this percentage declined according to year level from 76% of year 5 students to 56% of year 11 students eating two serves of fruit per day.⁵

Only 13% of students met the guidelines for vegetable intake. This percentage also declined according to year level with only 9% of year 11 students eating five serves of vegetables per day.⁵

Discretionary foods are typically high in added sugars, salt and saturated fat and are low in nutritional value.⁵⁽⁶⁾ Discretionary foods accounted for over 40% of adolescents daily energy intake.⁶

Australian school canteen research^{7,8,9,10,11,12} has found the top discretionary food sellers in schools include:

- Soft drinks and other sugar-sweetened beverages
- Unhealthy baked goods such as muffins and cakes
- Ice creams and icy poles
- Packaged potato chips
- Hot chips
- Crumbed fish or chicken products
- Savoury pies and pastries



FOOD POLICY CONTEXT

The Victorian Government Department of Education and Training have set out the [Canteens, Healthy Eating and Other Food Services Policy](#)³ which applies to food and drinks provided in the school environment through canteens, external companies supplying food to schools, vending machines, breakfast programs, school curriculum activities, rewards and incentives, sporting days and other school-based special events. All Victorian Government schools are expected to follow policy guidance from the Department of Education and Training. The [Canteens, Healthy Eating and Other Food Services Policy](#)³ uses the traffic light system to classify foods and drinks according to their nutritional quality. The categories are:

GREEN, 'everyday'



AMBER, 'select carefully'



RED, 'occasionally'



The Vic Kids Eat Well actions and bites for schools are in line with this policy, but take a stepped out approach to make it simple and more achievable for schools to make healthy changes.

FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES (FISO) 2.0¹³

The FISO was introduced as a key education state reform initiative, enabling all Victorian government schools to focus improvement efforts on priorities shown to have the greatest impact on students. The FISO 2.0 has been redesigned to place learning and wellbeing at the centre of school improvement. The FISO 2.0 has been simplified and streamlined to enable schools to focus on what matters most to improve every student's learning and wellbeing outcomes. Vic Kids Eat Well is a tool schools can use to address student health and wellbeing and may support them to meet the goals in their Annual Implementation Plans.



SCHOOL FOOD PROVISION

Food can be provided in schools through many ways including canteens, lunch orders, vending machines, special events such as morning teas or special lunches, fundraising activities and initiatives, school sport days or carnivals, curriculum activities and school breakfast clubs. Vic Kids Eat Well can assist with all aspects of the school food environment.

Canteens and lunch orders

Canteens can be run by the school with employed canteen staff or run by volunteers. Schools can also use an external or third-party provider such as commercial canteen companies, local bakeries or milk bars. Some schools may fully lease out their canteen to be managed and run by an external company, or they may order a subset of their canteen menu from an external provider. Some schools may not have a canteen but offer lunch orders on some days of the week. Usually, lunch orders are externally provided by local food businesses.

When working with schools on Vic Kids Eat Well, it is important to ask about and understand which types of food provision each school has.

EXTERNAL PROVIDERS

Many schools are transitioning away from the traditional school canteens to outsourcing lunches, menu items or canteen management from local food stores or larger commercial companies. For schools that are involved with an external provider, you may need to liaise with the school and the external provider to discuss how the external provider can make changes to meet the Vic Kids Eat Well actions. External providers are not eligible to participate directly in Vic Kids Eat Well. They can show support by aligning their menus and food and drink items with the actions. External providers can receive support through the [Healthy Eating Advisory Service](#). The main incentive for external providers is in being able to meet the school's needs and potentially gaining new customers through other schools participating in the movement that are seeking healthier suppliers.



School breakfast clubs

Many schools have a breakfast club to ensure all students start the day with a nutritious meal. Breakfast clubs may be school funded or provided by the Victorian Government's school breakfast club program, delivered by Foodbank Victoria. To learn more about School breakfast clubs, see [the Vic Kids Eat Well School Breakfast Club How-to-guide](#) on the Health Promoter Resource Hub in the Schools section.



HOW SCHOOLS CAN BE INVOLVED

There are various ways schools can participate in Vic Kids Eat Well, depending on the type of food provision available and how well the school is already meeting the actions. For many schools, participation in the movement will involve working through and completing all of the actions and bites.

For schools with limited food provision, they can work on the actions that are relevant. For example, if a school has no canteen or lunch order system, the menu-based bites may not be applicable. Instead, the school could focus on 'refresh the fridge' and work on improving the foods and drinks in vending machines, or 'putting the fun into fundraising and marketing' by adopting some healthy fundraising activities.

If a school has no food service, they can register to be a supporter of Vic Kids Eat Well and receive a supporter pack to help promote the movement. Some schools may already be achieving all of the bites and actions, in this case, schools can receive an advanced standing toolkit to celebrate and promote their commitment to healthy eating.

BARRIERS*

- Getting support from school or canteen management
- Pressure on profit
- Resistance to change from canteen, school management and/or community
- Staff or volunteer capacity to make changes
- Lack of 'whole of school' approach and support for the canteen
- Canteens closing, outsourcing of food to third-party providers
- Health literacy and nutrition knowledge of staff

*Based on previous Health Promoter and HEAS experience

ENABLERS

- Getting leadership and management support
- 'Whole of school' awareness, engagement and support
- Using values-based messaging in communications
- Taking things slow with a strengths-based approach
- Having regular meetings with stakeholders
- Taking a stepped-out approach to simplify healthy changes
- Involving students, families and school community in decision making
- Ability to change third-party food providers

ENGAGEMENT TIPS

When approaching schools to engage in Vic Kids Eat Well, our tips are:

- Find out the school's values and priorities and tailor your communication to suit your audience.
- Look at the school's annual implementation plan, policies and reports and showcase how Vic Kids Eat Well aligns with these.
- Aim to promote the 'whole of school' approach; engage with management, canteen staff, teaching staff, students and the school community.
- Amplify others' progress and successes and showcase to your schools to generate buzz and momentum.
- Use positive language, marketing and social media to promote their participation and healthy changes made.
- Emphasise the stepped-out approach, on the ground support, incentives and rewards that Vic Kids Eat Well offers.



WHERE TO NEXT?

We've had some great interest from schools for Vic Kids Eat Well. Help give kids a healthy start and support your local schools to join the movement today! Visit the [Vic Kids Eat Well](https://www.vickidseatwell.com.au) website to get started.



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