

Supporting healthy eating

Local government action guide no. 7

Promoting health and preventing illness in the community



Local governments play a major role in supporting the objectives of the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* by protecting, improving and promoting public health within their municipality. By integrating action across the social, cultural, built, economic and natural environments, council policies and practices can make major contributions to economic prosperity, community cohesion and population health outcomes.^{1,2}

Councils can play an important role in supporting healthy eating by helping residents to access healthy food and developing practical and long-lasting strategies to tackle food insecurity.

This guide is one of ten outlining a range of evidence-informed actions that councils may consider when preparing their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans and other strategies. The proposed strategies are consistent with national and state health promotion priorities and prevention frameworks, including *The Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2011–2015* and VicHealth's *Nutrition and food systems strategic framework paper*.

- It has been estimated that inadequate vegetable and fruit intake is responsible for 30 per cent of coronary heart disease, 20 per cent of gastrointestinal cancer and 14 per cent of stroke.⁵
- The average Australian adult eats out more than four times a week.⁶ Fast foods generally have larger portion sizes and are more energy dense, and are often higher in saturated fat and salt than meals prepared at home.⁷
- One-quarter of Australian children aged 5–17 years are overweight or obese,⁸ and 58 per cent of Victorian men and 38 per cent of Victorian women are overweight or obese.⁹
- One in 20 Victorians reported running out of food on at least one occasion in the past 12 months and couldn't afford to buy more. This is referred to as being 'food insecure'.⁹ Food insecurity can affect physical, mental and social wellbeing, and contribute to chronic disease and obesity over the longer term.
- Those most at risk of food insecurity include women and younger people, people with low or no income, and those in rural and regional Victoria or living in poor quality or insecure housing.⁹
- Socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in Melbourne host up to 2.5 times as many fast food outlets as other communities.^{9,10,11}

Why is supporting healthy eating a public health and wellbeing priority?

- Only 8.1 per cent of Victorians consume the recommended intake of vegetables, with 52 per cent consuming the recommended intake of fruit.³
- Unhealthy eating and low fruit and vegetable consumption contribute to high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and high rates of obesity. These risk factors cause up to 16 per cent of the burden of disease in Australia.⁴

Healthy food needs to be available, accessible and affordable so that food intake is sufficient, reliable, nutritious, safe, culturally appropriate and sustainable.¹²

A sample council strategy to support healthy eating

Strategic goal

Council will work to improve the supply of and access to a variety of affordable, culturally appropriate, safe and nutritious food in the community.

Objectives and actions

Adapt VicHealth's recommended *Ten ways local government can act on food security*¹³

Allocating responsibility – identify who advances the food security agenda

- Ensure council demonstrates leadership on local food security issues.
- Build formal program partnerships across council departments and key producer, retailer and community groups to work towards addressing local barriers to eating well.

Building the local picture – establish an evidence base

- Map existing council strategies and audit council-owned land for potential use for food purposes.
- Map data on transport, fresh and fast food outlets, local food prices, community gardens, socio-demographics and car ownership.¹⁴

Policy and planning – incorporate healthy eating into council policy and plans

- Integrate action on healthy eating by developing activities across business development, infrastructure, land use planning, environmental sustainability and human services.

Setting a good example – model healthy eating in council-run activities, facilities and programs

- Provide healthy and locally grown and produced food at council functions and in council-managed services.

Regulatory and fiscal power – use council's powers to drive change

- Consider fiscal incentives to increase fresh food outlets in local areas.

Land use planning – influence land use, business mix and the built environment

- Include spaces for community gardens, water collection and storage systems in new developments.

Healthy eating for residents – support residents to adopt healthy eating practices

- Provide information about local food outlets that offer cheap healthy meals.

Growing food locally – support residents to grow and harvest food

- Support home gardening, urban agriculture, neighbourhood orchards and community gardens in specific communities.

Getting food and residents together – build local partnerships

- Provide or subsidise community transport to get people to and from local shops and fresh food suppliers.

Advocacy – get your voice heard on food security

- Seek financial support from local businesses for local work-based, community or home fruit and vegetable growing initiatives.

References

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- 4 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008, *Australia's health: The eleventh biennial health report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*, AIHW, Canberra.
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- 8 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, *National health survey: Summary of results 2007–08*, cat. 4364.0, ABS, Canberra.
- 9 Department of Health, 2010, *Victorian population health survey report 2008: Selected findings*, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne.
- 10 Burns, C & Inglis, AD, 2007, 'Measuring food access in Melbourne: Access to healthy and fast foods by car, bus and foot in an urban municipality in Melbourne', *Health & Place*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 877–885.
- 11 Reidpath, DD, Burns, C, Garrard, J, Mahoney, M & Townsend, M, 2002, 'An ecological study of the relationship between social and environmental determinants of obesity', *Health & Place*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 141–145.
- 12 Rychetnik, L, Story, L & Katz, T, 2003, *Food security options paper: A food security planning framework: A menu of options for policy and planning interventions*, NSW Centre for Public Health Nutrition, Sydney.
- 13 Go to www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/foodforall for detailed fact sheets and micro-movies
- 14 See the Victorian Local Governance Association Food System Mapping Tool at www.vlga.org.au and the Heart Foundation Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design campaign at www.heartfoundation.org.au/driving-change/current-campaigns/local-campaigns/Pages/food-sensitive-planning.aspx