



Supporting healthy eating

Local government action guide

Councils can influence the quality and distribution of conditions needed for good health, that is, the natural, built and social environments in which we live, learn, work and play.¹ They have a major role in supporting the objectives of the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* by protecting, improving and promoting public health.²

Councils can make it easier for all residents to make healthy food and drink choices by:

- increasing equitable availability and accessibility of healthy food and drink choices
- increasing industry, organisation and local government policies and practices that equitably enable healthy food and drink choices
- supporting all residents equitably to make healthy food and drink choices through both whole-of-population as well as targeted program and campaign activity.

This guide is one of six providing evidence-informed actions that councils may consider when preparing their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans and other local strategies. The proposed strategies are consistent with state and national health promotion priorities and prevention frameworks including the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating 2013* and the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015–2019* (the Plan).^{3,5}

The Plan builds on a 'systems thinking' perspective that recognises the complexity of health issues and the underlying causes of poor health and wellbeing. It also identifies place-based approaches as a key platform for change, recognising that the places where people spend their time – communities, schools, workplaces, sporting clubs and more – play an important role in shaping their health and wellbeing. The aim is to maximise value by leveraging multiple networks, investments and activities to deliver outcomes for communities.

Links to other guides and further resources and available at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/localgovernmentguides.

Links to the Victorian Population Health Survey 2014 findings are available at www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/population-health-systems/health-status-of-victorians/survey-data-and-reports/victorian-population-health-survey/victorian-population-health-survey-2014.

For more detailed information on your area go to www.exploreyourdata.com.au.

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

- A healthy diet is vital for optimal growth, development and health throughout life and contributes to physical vitality, mental health and social wellbeing.⁶
- The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend eating a healthy diet with plenty of nutritious foods such as vegetables, fruit, lean proteins, low-fat milk, cheese and yoghurt, nuts and seeds and wholegrains; and low in discretionary foods that are high in excess energy (kilojoules), salt, added sugar and saturated and trans fats such as sugar-sweetened beverages and fried foods.³
- Most Australians do not eat the recommended serves of healthy food and drinks and around one-third (35%) of our total daily energy intake comes from discretionary or unhealthy food and drinks.⁷
- In Victoria, only one in 20 (6%) adults eat the recommended amount of five serves of vegetables per day, and half (48%) eat the recommended amount of two serves of fruit per day.⁴
- Almost two-thirds (61%) of Australian adults and one-quarter (25%) of Australian children are overweight or obese. There is further evidence that people living in areas of high social disadvantage are more likely to be overweight or obese, and to drink greater amounts of sugar-sweetened beverages.⁸
- In Australia, the total costs of overweight and obesity are estimated between \$58.1–62.1 billion per year with direct costs estimated at \$8–21 billion per year. In Victoria, this amounts to between \$14.4 billion annually in excess healthcare costs alone.^{9,10}
- In relation to Victorian adults, the VicHealth Indicators Survey 2015¹¹ found that:
 - Victorians are consuming less than half the recommended five servings of vegetables per day (2.2 serves)
 - Victorians from a non-English speaking background and who were unemployed or resided in a disadvantaged area consumed fewer vegetables than the population average
 - with an average of 1.6 serves of fruit per day, Victorians are also consuming less than the recommended 2 serves for this food group
 - the average Victorian only drinks 5.4 cups of water per day, significantly less than the recommended 8 cups for women and 10 cups for men
 - one in 10 Victorians eats take-away meals/snacks at least three times or more per week.

Understanding equity

Health equity is the notion that everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential and that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential if it can be avoided.

Inequities are the observed differences between population groups (e.g. a subpopulation group and the Victorian population) that stem from socioeconomic, political and cultural drivers of social position.

Equitable approaches are those aimed at closing the gap in outcomes for different population groups. This may mean providing additional support for people experiencing disadvantage in order to achieve equal outcomes.

Strategies to support healthy eating

Strategic goal

Council is committed to taking action to create opportunities to promote consumption of healthy food consistent with the Australian dietary guidelines.³

Objectives and actions

Create accessible and affordable healthier food and drink options

- Mandate and measure the preferential provision of healthy food and drink through endorsement of healthy catering policy and guidelines:^{12,13,14}
 - within council offices and events (e.g. healthy catering, fruit boxes)
 - in council-managed services (e.g. libraries, sport and recreation facilities)
 - at external community events and council-sponsored activities.
- Execute the standards of and promote the Victorian Achievement Program (www.achievementprogram.health.vic.gov.au) as a tool to encourage healthy eating and drinking in settings such as schools, childcare facilities, sports clubs and recreational facilities, workplaces and hospitals.¹⁵
- Ensure local government resources, policies and programs prioritise the facilitation of healthy eating for those groups who are at greatest risk of unhealthy eating habits.
- Install well-planned and well-designed drinking water fountains in open spaces and parks, recreational areas, shopping precincts, sport and recreation facilities, active transport routes and community spaces. VicHealth has produced *Provision of drinking water fountains in public areas: A local government action guide* (www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/provision-of-water-fountains).¹⁶

Establish local government policies and practices that enable healthy food and drink consumption

- Set explicit goals and objectives in relation to reducing inequities in healthy eating behaviours and opportunities.^{17,18} VicHealth's *About Fair Foundations and promoting health equity* resource provides further information about how this can be achieved – www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/fairfoundations.
- Prevent and reduce the marketing of sugar-sweetened drinks and unhealthy foods to children, particularly by engaging people attending or responsible for local sport and recreation facilities and activities, prioritising areas of disadvantage.¹⁹
- Encourage local retailers and food outlets to reduce salt in the food served through promoting healthy salt practices such as removing salt shakers, reducing salt used during food preparation and selecting low-salt options for ingredients.²⁰
- Incorporate consistent health messaging and awareness by supporting and utilising Victorian Government and other healthy eating campaigns and programs that promote healthy food options and water as the drink of choice.²¹

Support all residents to make healthier food and drink choices

- Support and encourage early healthy diet practices. For example, as breastfeeding is ideal for healthy growth and development of infants, create breastfeeding-friendly locations in councils and the community.²²
- Support access to a healthy food supply, increase food literacy and encourage community development through initiatives such as community kitchens, cooking classes, community gardens and school kitchen garden programs, and by sharing existing knowledge and resources.^{23,24}
- Support the development of local food hubs (connection between producers and consumers) ensuring accessibility and affordability for those experiencing greater disadvantage.²⁵
- Improve local government governance and regulations such as food safety and healthy food procurement that affect food hubs.²⁶
- Support healthy food procurement by providing access to information and resources, networking opportunities and funding.

Useful links

Healthy Food Connect

www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/policiesandguidelines/Healthy%20Food%20Connect%20A%20support%20resource

Healthy Choices guidelines

www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/preventive-health/nutrition/healthy-choices-for-retail-outlets-vending-machines-catering

Healthy Eating Advisory Service

www.heas.health.vic.gov.au

Rethink sugary drinks event toolkit

www.rethinksugarydrink.org.au/downloads/events-toolkit.pdf

Farm to Families model

www.foodbankvictoria.org.au/about-us/what-we-do/farms-to-families

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