



NATIONAL NUTRITION NETWORK

— EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE —

Promoting Healthy Sustainable Food Environments within early childhood education and care.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the Early Years Strategy. The National Nutrition Network-Early Childhood Education and Care (NNN-ECEC) is a community of practice made up of 34 influential ECEC researchers and academics, senior health practitioners within government organisations, and members of nutrition related not-for-profit non-government organisations from every state and territory in Australia.

Our goal is to facilitate consistency of information, research and practical application of nutrition related evidence-based learnings which will support ECEC staff to deliver healthier food environments for the children utilising ECEC services. More about our network can be found on our website. The following comments are a summary of invited responses from members

Disclaimer

The authors' content in this document represents the National Nutrition Networks stance and does not represent views of other employers the authors may have

QUESTION

1. Do you have any comments on the proposed structure of the Strategy?

Without funding for implementation and evaluation this strategy is unlikely to reach its potential. Integrating funding for implementation and evaluation is important to ensure the strategy achieves its vision. This includes funding for implementation, research (measurement, reach and effectiveness) continuity of education, nurturing care and sustainability.

The strategy would also benefit from having it visually represented and foreshadowed by other linked strategies e.g. the Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy.

QUESTION

2. What vision should our nation have for Australia's youngest children?

All children, infants and babies wherever they live, enjoy the same opportunities to optimally learn, develop, grow, be well nourished and thrive.

QUESTION

3. What mix of outcomes are the most important to include in the Strategy?

Over 900,000 children up to school-age attend ECEC services. These children could be accessing two-thirds of their daily dietary intake whilst at an ECEC service. ECEC have an opportunity to create supportive environments for optimal nutrition and development. Poor dietary behaviours are the leading modifiable risk factors for the development of non-communicable diseases (Afshin et al., 2017). ECEC settings are an ideal place for targeted, evidence-based interventions to reach young children and improve nutritional health, awareness and behaviors.

Appropriate environments promoting nutrition are vital for children to achieve optimal health and development. All infants and young children should have access to safe, nutritionally adequate and culturally appropriate foods and drinks at the right time. All infants and young children should 'have the opportunity to optimal feeding practices and an environment that fosters a healthy lifestyle'.

ECEC services in partnership with families present an opportunity to support child development through nourishing food provision and environments. By improving food provision and eating environments we positively impact:

- *Food security. "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". (FAO)*
- *Child developmental outcomes*
- *Broader public health efforts to promote a healthy weight and reduce childhood risk of overweight and obesity*
- *Short, medium and long term health outcomes for children and infants*
- *A child's positive relationships with foods and eating*
- *The capacity of educators and families to promote and foster healthy food and nutrition habits*

Strengthening healthy food environments and increasing the capabilities and capacity of the ECEC sector to support families and children with nutrition is underpinned by the right of the child enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory. Article 24 states that the child has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainment of health, including the provision of adequate and healthy food to combat current diet-related public health concerns of non-communicable diseases and overweight and obesity.

Reference:

Convention on the rights of the child, United Nations Human Rights, office of the high commissioner.
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

Nutritional outcomes should be a key focus of the strategy. This would include;

- ✓ *Provision of food group serves to optimise developmental outcomes in children, in ECEC nationally, as per Australian Dietary Guideline recommendations*
- ✓ *Increased access to and the consumption of healthy diets*
- ✓ *Increased provision of health and food literacy*
- ✓ *Prioritising funding interventions to support ECEC food environments and food provision in every state and territory, especially in locations of high disadvantage.*
- ✓ *Ensure ECEC services in each state and territory have access to free on the ground resource support. This will build capacity of services to respond to contextual needs, including first nations communities, multi-cultural, low SES etc., across Australia.*
- ✓ *Establishment of a Health and Wellbeing Taskforce to coordinate a national approach to the social and developmental outcomes of children, prioritising nutrition as a foundational requirement.*
- ✓ *Ensure that all nutritional outcomes are based on principles of;*
 - *accessibility,*
 - *greatest need equitable access*
 - *fulfilling children's right*
 - *Co-design and co-development in partnership with ECEC sector and families*
- ✓ *Update or replace national ECEC nutrition-related guides and associated resources, such as Get Up & Grow, with national guide and resources which are current, useable, driven by user-needs and reflective of lived experiences and contexts. The national Get Up & Grow guidelines and ECEC resources were developed in 2009. They were partially updated in 2013 to align with the Australian Dietary Guidelines. The Australian Dietary Guidelines are currently under review with completion scheduled for 2024. Since 2009, our understanding of nutrition in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings has advanced. This emerging evidence, knowledge and understanding is not incorporated in the current guide.*

4. What specific areas/policy priorities should be included in the Strategy and why?

There is evidence that knowledge and practice improvement in ECEC food environments lead to improved health outcomes. Increased nutritional and health outcomes support learning and development outcomes. They also help governments achieve health policy objectives. For example, objectives set in

- *the Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy*
- *The National Preventative Strategy*
- *the National Obesity Strategy 2022-2032.*

It is the right of every child to be supported in their development and education, as well as supported in the provision and access to healthy nutritious food for the prevention of NCDs and the promotion of a healthy weight (Article 24, CRC). This includes having ready access to appropriately nourishing food. ECECs must be supported to provide this nourishing food. This support should include

Reference; McGuire, J., Gallegos, D., & Irvine, S. (2018). Infant feeding nutrition policies in Australian early childhood education and care services: a content and qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 12(1), 14.

Training

Updating nutrition training for ECEC vocational and university students including

- *Nutrition training for educators and cooks*
- *ECEC leadership training for management,*
- *Authorized officer training to support food environment compliance in ECEC*
- *Build ECEC educator capacity to support feeding. This can be achieved through up to date training and professional development.*
- *Review and strengthen the quality and currency of nutrition curriculum in vocational and university training for ECEC staff*
- *Establish education standards of best practice for training, including vocational and university curriculum, and RTOs.*
- *Review and establish national minimum competency-based qualifications for cooks and chefs*

Support

Currently only NSW, Tasmania and Victoria have free support for nutrition in ECECs. This should be expanded to every jurisdiction.

Building evidence

Embedding an opportunity to capture ECEC food provision methods in childcare management or assessment and rating systems, (ACECQA). Increasing access to and the consumption of nourishing, healthy food in the ECEC settings. A mechanism to capture and share information about food provided in ECEC services. For example centres could be asked "In your service, how do children access food? 1. Food provided on site (i.e., prepared and provided onsite by a qualified chef or cook) 2. All meals prepared and provided onsite by an educator or other staff member 3. Third party caterer is contracted to provide meals to children 4. Parents are asked to provide morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea 5. Other, please specify (e.g. parents are asked to provide morning tea or lunch only, centre provides rest)"

Focusing on Food Security

Evidence shows having nourishing food at ECEC services is not enough. Providing healthy eating education at ECECs is of little benefit when these foods cannot be accessed in communities. Policies need to acknowledge and reflect the diverse experiences of families such as families who may be food insecure. The effects of food insecurity can have lifelong consequences for children. Currently children who are food insecure at home are also likely to be food insecure in ECEC services due to inadequate food provision, based on the Australian Dietary Guideline recommendations.

Improvements: Nutrition in ECEC should

- Acknowledge and support the specific dietary needs of infants and young children.
 - Reflect the diverse needs of different types of services
 - Long Day Care, (Centre Based Care)
 - Family Day Care and
 - Home Care.
- Reflect and represent the needs and experiences of diverse families. This means supporting the inclusion of families who may be
 - food insecure,
 - from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
 - living with a disability
 - living with a food allergy
 - living with disadvantage
- Reflect different types of food provision, including
 - Services who plan, prepare, cook and provide food at their service
 - services that have food from external providers
 - Services where food is provided from home (lunch box services)
- Reflect the range of contexts and lived experiences found across all ECEC services. This includes the staff that work within the services and the communities they operate.
- Acknowledge and address all of the determinants of food choice that impact children, families and the ECEC sector so they are empowered and supported with appropriate strategies.

For more detailed information covering the evidence behind these recommendations please see the attached policy briefs.

Supporting policy and evidence briefs

- [National Nutrition Network \(2022\) Policy Brief — Achieving Equality and Equity in the Provision of Food and Nutrition Support in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings: Opportunities and Actions for System Change in Australia.](#) (National Nutrition Network - Early Childhood Education and Care [NNN-ECEC], 2022b)
 - [National Nutrition Network \(2022\) Evidence Brief — Achieving Equality and Equity in the Provision of Food and Nutrition Support in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings:](#)
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[Opportunities and Actions for System Change in Australia.](#) (National Nutrition Network - Early Childhood Education and Care [NNN-ECEC], 2022a)

- [National Nutrition Network \(2022\) Policy Brief — A Case for Mapping Food Provision across jurisdictions and ECEC services and settings: How one tick box can build and support the bigger picture in early childhood health and education development.](#) (National Nutrition Network - Early Childhood Education and Care [NNN-ECEC], 2022c)
- [National Nutrition Network \(2022\) Policy Brief - A Call to update the National Get Up and Grow guidelines and associated resources.](#) (National Nutrition Network - Early Childhood Education and Care [NNN-ECEC], 2022d)

5. What could the Commonwealth do to improve outcomes for children—particularly those who are born or raised in more vulnerable and/or disadvantaged circumstances?

Evidence-based interventions are effective in promoting improved nutritional health outcomes and practice change in the ECEC area (Matwiejczyk et al., 2020, . (Seward et al., 2018, Yoong et al22). Good nutrition does more than nourish the body, it is linked with neurodevelopmental benefits and improved wellbeing. Downstream effects of good nutrition such as maternal and family wellbeing are also significant.

Children in the ECEC setting are establishing their dietary habits and preferences for the rest of their life (Bell et al., 2015). Therefore, exposure to nutritious food is important at this critical time point. There are multiple evidence-based nutrition interventions in ECEC settings (Yoong et al., 2019; Matwiejczyk et al., 2018; Bell et al., 2015). These are effective at increasing intake of core food groups. Some examples of these are listed below;

Reference; Mcguire, J. (2020). Exploring barriers and enablers in early childhood education and care services to meet Australian infant feeding guidelines (Doctoral dissertation, Queensland University of Technology).

Update Get Up and Grow Guidelines

There are a range of diverse resources available to support ECEC services around Australia. Yet, the distribution of support is not equal. National guidelines and resources, such as updated Get up and Grow Guidelines, can partially address this gap.

There is also an opportunity to make the most of the timing of the current Australian Dietary Guidelines update to be completed in 2024. This would also fit with the new Early Years Learning Framework. Crucial to this is co-designing and co-developing guides and resources with the ECEC sector and nutrition expertise. There is an opportunity to engage with the ECEC sector and innovative sharing tools and differentiate the resources to ensure optimal engagement with the guides and resources developed.

It is time to update or replace the Get up & Grow guidelines and associated resources to ensure a national support tool that is current, useable, driven by user needs, and is reflective of lived experiences and contexts.

Reference:

Alison Spence, Penny Love, Rebecca Byrne, Amy Wakem, Louisa Matwiejczyk, Amanda Devine, Rebecca Golley, Ros Sambell, (2020). Childcare food provision recommendations vary across Australia: jurisdictional comparison and nutrition expert perspectives. International J environmental

Provide and improve training quality of ECEC service providers and strengthen professionalisation of the workforce.

Research has shown that educators within centre-based care services believe that food provision falls outside their professional practice. Currently, many educators are reverting to personal health beliefs and values when sharing information with children and parents in services. Training should also be extended to authorised officers, vocational education and training, university courses and the quality being monitored.

References:

McGuire, J., Irvine, S., Smith, J., & Gallegos, D. (2020). Creating supportive environments for responsive infant feeding in Australian early childhood education and care. *Breastfeeding Review*, 28(3), 47–64. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.480879740858078>

Matwiejczyk, L., Mehta, K., & Coveney, J. (2021). Factors influencing food service provision decisions in centre-based early childhood education and care services: Cooks' perspective. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 32(1), 107-116.

This training under the auspices of the Commonwealth should

- ✓ increase competencies embedded in qualifications relating to food environments
- ✓ acknowledge and support the specific dietary needs of infants and young children. Evidence shows further educator training is needed to adequately support breastfed babies.
- ✓ increase educator efficacy to support through up-to-date training and professional development. Including:
 - Supporting food allergy management. Research 42% of services are excluding a food when a child with an allergy attends a service. There are many gaps in managing this and support from the National Allergy Council is advised
- ✓ link with Shaping Our Future: National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy
 - development of implementation plan and commitments to boost ECEC workforce
 - incl. fee- free TAFE places, Y Care Careers program

Reference

McGuire, J., Irvine, S., Smith, J., & Gallegos, D. (2021). Australian early childhood educators and infant feeding: a qualitative analysis using social cognitive theory. *Early Child Development and Care*, 191(5), 773-788.

Marrollo, T, Netting M, Vale S, L Matwiejczyk Assessing food allergy management in Australian Early Childhood Education and Care Long Day Care services. Conference proceedings, Dietitians Australia National Conference, August 2022

Hua T, Sambell R, Wallace R, Vale S, Devine A. Food allergy management in Early Childhood Education and Care Services in Australia. *J Paediatr Child Health*. 2020;56(3):394-9.

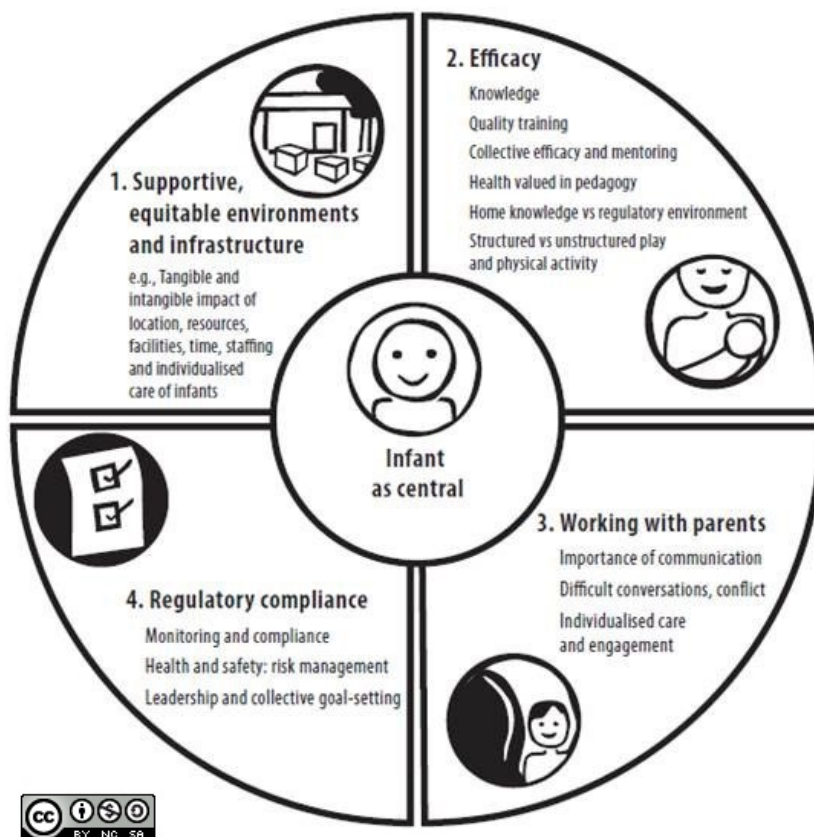
Diversified interventions are needed to ensure all ECEC service provision staff are adequately

supported to promote optimal health outcomes in ECEC settings. To date there has been a strong focus on educators' roles within a service, however the vital role of the cook tends to be less well supported.

Children in ECEC benefit from cooks' commitment to providing safe and nutritious foods. The requirements to extend the cook's role to respond to increasing demands without relevant system-level support and training puts the children at risk of not being exposed to health-promoting menus. This could lead to possible errors in providing dietary modifications. ECEC cooks urgently need access to system-level support and food and nutrition training. (Matwiejczyk et al., 2021). Note that NSW already delivers training workshops for cooks

In addition to training and further professionalism of the ECEC workforce around nutrition, the Commonwealth could lead in partnership with ECEC sector minimum standards for cooks and chefs providing food. (Matwiejczyk et al., 2021)

Figure 1. Standards Assessors perceptions of implementation of infant and young child feeding and physical activity in Australian Early Education and Care settings



<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.9860804.v1>

McGuire, Julianne; Gallegos, Danielle; Smith, Julie; Irvine, Susan (2019): Standards Assessors perceptions of implementation of infant feeding and young child feeding and physical activity in Australian Early Education and care settings. figshare. Figure.

<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.9860804.v1>

Lead several national strategies to improve nutrition ECEC support services focused to the most vulnerable and address inequities

According to Australian Early Development Census, SA children living in the most disadvantaged communities are twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable at 33.8% than those living in least disadvantaged communities, and this figure is increasing over the years (Dept. Education 2022; Commonwealth Australia 2022) . When reviewing any data investigating children's health, developmental and educational outcomes with SES and SEIFA, there is a clear gradient where children living with disadvantage are significantly worse off. In a QLD study, triangulating this data with ECEC services and types of food provision clearly showed further disparities (Thorpe et al., 2022). Further studies investigating ECEC food provision and disadvantage support this (Searle et al., 2022a, 2022b).

Equality of access to support services and resources is insufficient to overcome all the inequalities. This includes those faced by those infants, children, parents, caregivers, communities, and ECEC services with most need.

References

*Australian Early development Census, An Australian Government Initiative. 2021 AEDC Snapshot 3. Available online
<https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/2021-aedc-results>
<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/docs/early-years/aedc/snapshot-3-communities-in-sa.pdf>*

There is much more that can and should be done to improve the reach, relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of such support. Resources should be developed to target and help those most in need. This action would align with current agreements such as the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education. This document has a particular focus on

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children,*
- vulnerable children, and*
- children experiencing disadvantage.*

Thorpe et al. (2020) assess the way in which the competitive economic market of ECEC is associated with food provision across communities in Queensland. They found that children living in disadvantaged communities, where food insecurity is higher, are least likely to have meals provided by their ECEC service.

Research has identified major gaps in service delivery for Aboriginal families. It points to the need for a coordinated, culturally responsive systems approach. This would include capacity building for staff, and supportive systems and policies in both regional (Myers et al., 2014) and remote settings. Tailored programs have been shown to increase participants' knowledge and confidence regarding nutrition and physical activity in ECEC settings. The importance of community consultation, building relationships and face-to-face delivery of training being highlighted as key enablers (Murtha et al., 2021).

ECEC services are also potential pathways for engaging with families to optimise nutrition and food safety for children, particularly in jurisdictions that do not have strong public health networks.

There is a need to support Family Day Care (FDC) schemes to improve their nutrition environments,

particularly those related to policies (Lum et al., 2021) and promoting safe and healthy eating and meeting dietary guidelines (Kerr et al., 2021). A systematic review of interventions to improve the dietary intake, physical activity and weight status of children attending FDC services aged 0–6 highlighted few existing interventions in fFDC services and a need for high-quality controlled trials to identify effective interventions to improve children’s diet, activity and weight in this setting (Yoong et al., 2020). Research however suggests that FDC services have substantial scope to improve the implementation of recommended healthy eating, physical activity and obesity prevention policies, practices and programs (Wolfenden et al., 2020; Lum et al., 2021).

Ensure the needs of children and families who have food allergies are considered in all elements of support services from policy and training to learning and engagement activities for children. Provide advice and support on inclusion of children with a disability.

References;

Searle, Bonnie, Staton, Sally, Littlewood, Robyn and Thorpe, Karen (2023). *Mealtimes in the context of poverty: Comparison of ECEC services providing food and those requiring food provided from home*. *Child: Care, Health and Development*. doi: 10.1111/cch.13109

Thorpe, Karen, Potia, Azhar Hussain, Searle, Bonnie, Van Halen, Olivia, Lakeman, Nicole, Oakes, Candice, Harris, Holly and Staton, Sally (2022). *Meal provision in early childhood education and care programs: Association with geographic disadvantage, social disadvantage, cost, and market competition in an Australian population*. *Social Science & Medicine*, 312 115317, 1-10. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.115317

Searle, Bonnie-Ria E., Staton, Sally S., Littlewood, Robyn and Thorpe, Karen (2022). *Associations between food provision and feeding practices in socially disadvantaged childcare centres*. *Appetite*, 169 105811, 1-10. doi: 10.1016/j.appet.2021.105811

There is much that the Commonwealth could do to improve outcomes for children born or living with disadvantage including

- universal provision of free healthy food through ECEC services for children. ECEC services provided with the funding for cooks and chefs and for food.
- alternatively subsidized program similar to the American program listed as a desired focus in this application
- collect relevant and consistent data on food provision in ECEC services using existing mechanisms. By giving open access to data collected, policy-makers, program-planners and the ECEC sector can utilise this data for directing extra support and resources to those most in need
- provide adequate resources for training and support

References

- [National Nutrition Network \(2022\) Policy Brief — Achieving Equality and Equity in the Provision of Food and Nutrition Support in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings: Opportunities and Actions for System Change in Australia](#). (National Nutrition Network - Early Childhood Education and Care [NNN-ECEC], 2022b)
 - [National Nutrition Network \(2022\) Evidence Brief — Achieving Equality and Equity in the Provision of Food and Nutrition Support in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings: Opportunities and Actions for System Change in Australia](#). (National Nutrition Network - Early Childhood Education and Care [NNN-ECEC], 2022a)
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- [National Nutrition Network \(2022\) Policy Brief — A Case for Mapping Food Provision across jurisdictions and ECEC services and settings: How one tick box can build and support the bigger picture in early childhood health and education development.](#) (National Nutrition Network - Early Childhood Education and Care [NNN-ECEC], 2022c)
 - [National Nutrition Network \(2022\) Policy Brief - A Call to update the National Get Up and Grow guidelines and associated resources.](#) (National Nutrition Network - Early Childhood Education and Care [NNN-ECEC], 2022d)

Ensure that funded state wide interventions are available in every jurisdictions across Australia and are reflective of the diversity of local needs across the whole jurisdiction.

The extent with which we are meeting children's nutritional needs in Australian ECEC settings is not equally or fairly distributed. (ref Policy Brief 1; Spence et al.,) Furthermore, we are not meeting the child's rights to healthy food for development and the prevention of NCDs and malnutrition (overweight, obesity) according to the UN Charter of the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory. (reference MATwiejczyk, 2020; UNCHR 1948)

Reference

Matwiejczyk L (2020) A synthesis study and Child Rights Situational Study of nutrition practices while in centre-based childcare, Chapter 6 in Understanding the translation of evidence-based nutrition practice into daily routines in centre-based childcare (PhD dissertation Flinders University).

*At a minimum ensure equality of nutrition support services for ECECs nationally
Nutrition interventions have been shown to improve long day care nutrition policies (Matwiejczyk et al., 2007), and menus (Pollard et al., 2001). The number of states delivering healthy food environment support services for the ECEC sector has decreased over the past decade.*

Reference;

McGuire, J., Gallegos, D., & Irvine, S. (2018). Infant feeding nutrition policies in Australian early childhood education and care services: a content and qualitative analysis. International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy, 12(1), 14.

Some jurisdictions have a better established nutrition and public health workforce than others. Across the board, the dietetics workforce has limited on-the-ground engagement with ECEC services. These differentiated workforce structures across the country mean access to quality subject matter expertise is limited.

Improve Nutrition Data Collection

There is a lack of relevant and consistent data available identifying the type of food service provision across ECEC services. We know food access, food provision and food quality play a vital role in supporting early child education and health development. Without understanding the range and context of food access and provision in ECEC settings existing, emerging and future support services, programs and training run the risk of:

- *Not addressing existing and actual gaps and needs*
 - *Not reflecting the needs of all ECEC services*
 - *Doubling up on existing support whilst leaving other areas of need unattended*
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- *Overlooking key staff within ECEC healthy food environments, such as Cooks*
- *Overlooking the importance of partnership roles with Parents/Carers*
- *Overlooking key external stakeholders needs such as third party food provision providers*
- *Burdening ECEC Educators with requirements and tasks not suited to their role*
- *Action on food provision subsidies. Commonwealth could designate specific funding or subsidies towards meals provided at ECECs.*

What areas do you think the Commonwealth could focus on to improve coordination and collaboration in developing policies for children and families?

Systems supporting the ECEC sector must be considered as levers for change and guide a nationally coordinated approach.

- a. Changes to legislation (prescribing food provision requirements and food provision expectations),
- b. Reviewing and updating assessment and rating processes (identifying food as a foundational requirement, thus prioritising monitoring of food provision compared to the current approach of one half of 40 elements which require assessment. According to assessment and rating officers the current approach deprioritizes food in the assessment and rating process)
- c. The assessment and rating model is education focused, and early childhood is a time if foundational needs are not met, such as sufficient nutrient provision, will have the greatest negative impact on a child's brain and physical health.
- d. Providing equitable on the ground free support in every jurisdiction to ECEC services to support quality food provision (currently only three Australian jurisdictions (Tas, NSW and Victoria provide any free support).
- e. Develop vocational training for ECEC Directors to include leadership skills to improve staff retention and capability, thus improving professional identity
- f. Develop vocational training for ECEC Cooks to support menu planning and food allergy management skills, , thus improving professional identity

Funding

- a. Funding a knowledge brokering community of practice, such as the **National Nutrition Network**, in an advisory capacity to support relevant government department decision makers to share expertise of its members to support a nationally coordinated approach by filling the current gap of evidence being adopted into policy and practice.
- b. Funding to research contextualized environments such as food insecure rural remote settings, marginalised communities. This would support targeted resourcing for those that need it most. Historically resources have been developed for the 'average' ECEC service Therefore using evidence to develop contextualised resources for those that need it most is where change would have the greatest impact.
- c. Funding for research and development, implementation research (measurement, reach and effectiveness), continuity of education, nurturing care, scalability and sustainability. Including a national audit to

determine food provision status of ECEC across Australia to inform resourcing and intervention strategies utilising an evidence based method (Sambell et al., 2019).

- d. Integrating a funding model to ensure strategies are implemented and evaluated provides a level of coordinated accountability which has previously been absent for funding in this sector, instead funding has been ad hoc and inequitably distributed across Australian jurisdictions. This means there has been investment to develop support yet often it is jurisdictionally focused and is only accessible for the duration of funding. A sustainable approach to future funding needs to be well considered and integrated into ECEC systems to provide an enduring impact.
 - e. Specifying a proportion of the childcare subsidy for food provision in ECEC using a similar US successful model
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK209813/>
- ✓ *Extending paid maternity leave to support women to breastfeed for as long as possible. This would include facilitating lawful lactation breaks and inclusive environments (including in the ECEC as a workplace). The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for around 6 months when complementary foods are introduced, then ongoing breastfeeding to two years and beyond for optimal health outcomes.*
 - ✓ *Implementation of the WHO International Code for Marketing of Breastfeeding Substitutes in Australia to include Toddler Formula regulation. This will reduce use in ECEC and align with WHO and AIF guidelines. Toddler Formula is not recommended. It has high sugar content (up to 60 teaspoons extra per month).*
 - ✓ *Access to quality ECEC for children of all ages (not just the two years prior to school)*
 - ✓ *Funding to equip ECEC to provide safe, nutritious and adequate food to all infants and children regardless of location.*
 - ✓ *Nutrition is foundational to child developmental outcomes*
 - ✓ *Quarantine a financial amount from childcare subsidy to ensure all ECEC provide food to children. This would ensure children are food secure when they attend services. Research found long day care services in Perth were spending, on average, \$2.00 per child per day across morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea. Modelling, suggested that spending an extra 50¢—a total of \$2.50 per child per day—would ensure that all food groups would actually met the 50 per cent dietary recommendations. This is considered the baseline provision for this sector.*
 - ✓ *Utilizing a proven model The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), which uses a social justice approach (maintains integrity of support), using ECEC environments to distribute food relief boxes, parent/staff report*
 - ✓ *incorporating more detailed requirements for food provision, including mealtime management, would benchmark equality of food provision for this setting.*

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM AMSANT FOOD SUMMIT REPORT [FOOD](#)

[SUMMIT REPORT \(amsant.org.au\)](#)

“The Australian Government through its entities and the food industry to assist remote community stores to collaborate and develop partnerships with local food producers, wholesalers and other remote community stores to lower the cost and increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables”

“The Australian Government to fund a feasibility study to determine the most practical way to implement a subsidy scheme that increases the availability of healthy food for people living in remote communities at a more affordable cost for consumers.”

The Australian Government to invest in the upgrade and expansion of community stores to allow for increased availability of fresh foods, including meat, fruits and vegetables, and healthy takeaway options

The Australian Government to adequately fund and expand the remote stores licensing program by monitoring all food security aspects of remote stores; access, affordability, availability and safety of healthy food. Benchmarking should be used, working with the health sector, through the licensing program to provide information to store committees to support community decision making

Governments and Land Councils to review and develop a remote stores lease agreement that ensures the viability and sustainability of remote stores in line with other essential services.

The Australian Government to increase social welfare payments including; i. JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and other related payments to be permanently and adequately increased to keep people out of poverty. ii. An increase in the rate of the remote area allowance in line with higher cost of living of remote regions of the Northern Territory. iii. Ongoing indexation of all payments in line with wage movements at least twice a year.

That the Australian Government implements APO NT's Fair Work and Strong Communities proposal for a remote development and employment scheme to enhance employment opportunities and community led development for Aboriginal people.

Australian Governments to invest in more social housing in both remote and regional centers that are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal people

The establishment of a food security working group with representation from all relevant sectors reporting directly to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. The working group to be charged with supporting the collaboration between sectors and development of an action plan to implement changes in the NT food system that support greater equity in the access and availability of healthy food.

Australian and Northern Territory Governments conduct open grant opportunities for community-controlled organisations to implement programs to improve access to healthy food for Aboriginal communities. This could include support for local transport solution, community stores, local food production and harvesting.

the development of a local community-based workforce where community members are trained and adequately supported (by public health nutritionists/dietitians, Health promotion officers and Chronic disease workers) as local nutrition promotion officers. These Aboriginal health promotion officers should be involved in: i. Community-wide nutrition promotion through use of local language, cook-ups, group education, hunting trips and education on traditional foods to children in schools with elders ii. Store and food provision program assessments so as to provide information to operators on where improvements could be made for the promotion of healthy food and less promotion of unhealthy food in line with communities needs iii. In partnership with stores, early learning, schools, rangers and local councils, set-up and maintain promotional activities that support access to traditional foods, nutrition education and knowledge sharing.”

QUESTION

7. What principles should be included in the Strategy?

- *The ‘first 1000 days’ presents a key window of opportunity where action can have a lifelong effect on health and wellbeing. All children should have access to the best opportunity in the first 1000 days*
- All initiatives should be co-developed in partnership with and ideally I the ECEC sector
- State Parties including Commonwealth Government, fulfilling their obligations for children having access to healthy foods and food environments while in ECEC settings as per Article 24, UN Charter of the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory

Reference

Matwiejczyk L (2020) A synthesis study and Child Rights Situational Study of nutrition practices while in centre-based childcare, Chapter 6 in Understanding the translation of evidence-based nutrition practice into daily routines in centre-based childcare (PhD dissertation Flinders University).

Broader System:

- Updating the National Law (2010/2012) to prescribe food provision expectations (infants and young children) for ECEC services is necessary to improve the current discretion and flexibility in regulations, as well as to support policy development across the system. The proposed change could also help to address policies directed at improving food security, representing a key avoidable risk for the ECEC sector. The proposal is aimed at establishing a clear and consistent standard for ECEC services to provide nourishing food to infants and young children.
- Quarantining a percentage of the current childcare subsidy to fund food in ECEC is especially important in areas of high disadvantage, including rural, remote and very remote locations. This approach could be achieved by applying a similar model to the “Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)” in the United States. The aim is to ensure that all children attending ECEC services have access to nutritious food, regardless of their location or family income.
- Funding a knowledge brokering community of practice, such as the National Nutrition Network, is necessary to support relevant government department decision makers to share expertise of its members to support a nationally coordinated approach by filling the current gap of evidence being adopted into policy and practice. This approach can help to promote consistent and evidence-based policies across the ECEC sector.

Assessment and rating:

- Training assessment and rating officers to support food environment compliance in ECEC is necessary to ensure that the standards for food provision in ECEC services are met. This will require developing appropriate training programs that will help these officers identify and address any issues related to food provision in ECEC services.
- Adding a question to the assessment and rating system to capture ECEC services food provision type and make this available to public health professionals to facilitate more targeted resourcing is important. This approach will enable public health professionals to identify areas where additional support is needed to improve food provision in ECEC services.

Support for ECEC services:

- Providing free resources and support to guide best practice in the ECEC food environment for all ECEC services is necessary to ensure that all children attending these services have access to nutritious

food. The lack of free resources and support in some states represents an equity issue and may limit the ability of some services to provide the best possible nutrition to children.

- Providing guidelines and expectations for food provision for ECEC is important to ensure that all ECEC services are aware of the standards they need to meet to provide nutritious food to children. These guidelines should be evidence-based and reflect the diverse needs and experiences of different types of services and families.

Training and education:

- Developing, reviewing, and revising nutrition training for ECEC vocational and university students is necessary to ensure that all ECEC staff are adequately trained to provide nutritious food to children. This training should cover a range of topics, including food provision training for cooks, ECEC leadership training for directors/management, curriculum and mealtime management training for educators, and food environment compliance training for assessment and rating officers.
- Establishing education standards of best practice for training, including vocational and university curriculum, and Registered Training Organisations is necessary to ensure that ECEC staff receive consistent and high-quality training across the sector. This will help to promote consistent and evidence-based practices for providing nutritious food to children in ECEC services.

QUESTION

8. Are there gaps in existing frameworks or other research or evidence that need to be considered for the development of the Strategy?

A number of gaps have been identified in the following policy briefs. Each focuses on a specific issue. Please see

- [National Nutrition Network \(2022\) Policy Brief — Achieving Equality and Equity in the Provision of Food and Nutrition Support in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings: Opportunities and Actions for System Change in Australia.](#) (National Nutrition Network - Early Childhood Education and Care [NNN-ECEC], 2022b)
- [National Nutrition Network \(2022\) Evidence Brief — Achieving Equality and Equity in the Provision of Food and Nutrition Support in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings: Opportunities and Actions for System Change in Australia.](#) (National Nutrition Network - Early Childhood Education and Care [NNN-ECEC], 2022a)
- [National Nutrition Network \(2022\) Policy Brief — A Case for Mapping Food Provision across jurisdictions and ECEC services and settings: How one tick box can build and support the bigger picture in early childhood health and education development.](#) (National Nutrition Network - Early Childhood Education and Care [NNN-ECEC], 2022c)
- [National Nutrition Network \(2022\) Policy Brief - A Call to update the National Get Up and Grow guidelines and associated resources.](#) (National Nutrition Network - Early Childhood Education and Care [NNN-ECEC], 2022d)

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