Hot topic discussion 13 June 2017

**Health and education sector collaboration – how do you engage schools in your health program?**

 This discussion aimed to share the experiences of schools and health agencies in delivering health promotion programs.

Barriers to engaging schools include:

* Lack of budget allocation/funding in schools. Health is often combined with the PE budget, which may mean that PE equipment and resources take priority.
* Health education often has a lower status or importance in schools over PE and other learning areas
* Teacher skills, knowledge and confidence may be limited or need improving with health content, especially for sensitive topics
* ATAR Health Studies course for years 11 and 12 is still new and has limited supporting resources for teachers.
* Time allocation for health education is limited. Recommended time allocations can include PE with health
* Teachers/schools may not be aware of the agencies, support and resources that are available.
* Schools may pay for a health ‘expert’, but this does not guarantee their qualifications or quality. However, schools may not value free advice or services.

Enablers – what helps school health programs

* Collaboration with other agencies, including sharing of ideas and cross promotion to schools
* Issues that are linked with student learning have a better up-take. For example, hungry students or those with a poor diet may not learn as effectively, meaning that providing a nutritious breakfast provides health and education benefits.
* Having a mandated policy on an issue, for example, the Healthy Food and Drink Policy has ensured schools have an obligation to ensure that nutrition standards are met. Health issues without a policy requirement may not be seen to be as relevant
* The support of the principal is needed to ensure a program’s success
* Having a school champion who is personally committed and passionate is an asset (but they can be difficult to identify)

Tips for communicating with schools

* Find a leader or champion in the school
* Use case studies of what other schools are doing
* Information dissemination needs to be electronic and hard copy
* It can be difficult to get information past the front office and to the correct person
* Consider timing of communication. Phone calls at 3pm on a Friday will not be well received. There are certain times of the day and times of the term that may be more appropriate. If a teacher contacts you, get back to them quickly, while you still have their attention
* Be brief and to the point in all communications
* For bulk email communications, consider personalising information. Be aware of servers blocking your emails. Sending emails to less than 50 recipients and after school hours is recommended by the Department of Education.
* Spend time updating contact details in your own databases. This ensures that the information is still going to the right person.

Tips to engaging schools include:

* Be reactive to issues being discussed in schools. For example, recent discussions on ’13 Reasons Why’ provided opportunities to discuss the issues raised in this TV series.
* Be familiar with the WA curriculum. Mapping resources to the curriculum will help. Most concepts can be made to fit the curriculum somewhere! Having curriculum tasks that include an assessment task will be popular.
* Plan communications or promotions to fit in with teacher planning. Many teachers plan during the last two weeks of term for the following term’s work
* Provide free resources/programs/advice
* Engage with newly qualified teachers. They are hungry for resources and are keen (but may lack the influence to implement whole school changes)
* Provide templates/resources/information. Save schools time in developing their own. Make it easy/easier!
* Provide different ways for schools to engage with programs. For example, have classroom based and whole school initiatives.