



Supporting healthy choices

School lunch programs

  @WASCAinc

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Hungry for change

- Western Australia Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2022-2023
- Aim: To find ways to address food insecurity for children living in poverty, acknowledging that every child has a right to sufficient good food every day
 - 7 overarching terms of references
 - Including, Government-funded school lunch programs
- This inquiry investigated the effectiveness of
 - food relief programs
 - food literacy programs
 - a school lunch program
- **Why? The physical problems of under-nutrition and malnutrition can turn into mental health problems, social problems and education disadvantage**



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Hungry for change - Findings

- Around 17% of children in WA live with food insecurity, determining an exact figure is difficult due to a lack of measurement
- Family income, where you live, disadvantaged communities and difficult home circumstances can make it challenging for children and young people to access good food
- Being a child is a barrier, since children rely on adults for everyday necessities
- 58 significant findings e.g.
 - A universal lunch program would embrace the concept of nutrition as an integral part of school education and avoid stigmatising children and young people from low income households, but would cost the government more than a targeted program
 - With no parental co-payment, the cost of providing a free school lunch for all government school students on all school days is estimated at \$400 million to \$600 million per year
 - A parental co-payment is considered necessary and reasonable in many places, although it can be difficult to collect
 - Primary producers can benefit from school lunch programs which stipulate procurement of local produce



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Hungry for change - Findings

- 24 recommendations e.g.
 - Department of Education:
 - identifies how many WA schools are using their own funds to provide free food for students
 - takes the lead in establishing a pilot school lunch program targeting a selection of low socio-economic metropolitan, regional and remote schools
 - investigates the potential for grant funding from the National Indigenous Australians Agency to provide a lunch program for schools in WA's remote communities, similar to the NT School Nutrition Project
 - The Minister for Education uses the renewal of the National School Reform Agreement to put a school lunch program on the national reform agenda
 - Provision of a school lunch – particularly for disadvantaged students – be included as an action in WA's bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth on quality schools reform
 - State Government should apply a whole-of-government approach in considering a school lunch program model



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School lunch program - WA



- Many schools have formal or informal policies and practices to ensure that children do not go hungry whilst at school
- Often this includes food being supplied through:
 - School funds and coordination
 - Canteen funds and/or P&C funds
 - Canteen staff and volunteer funds and generosity
 - Using school breakfast program supplies



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Northern Territory

- Various programs and funding e.g.
- National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) grant recipients; School Nutrition Project; combination of breakfast, morning tea, lunch or afternoon tea; n=75
- Alice Springs School Nutrition Program delivered by Aust. Regional and Remote Community Services (via Centrelink payments) n=8



Western Australia

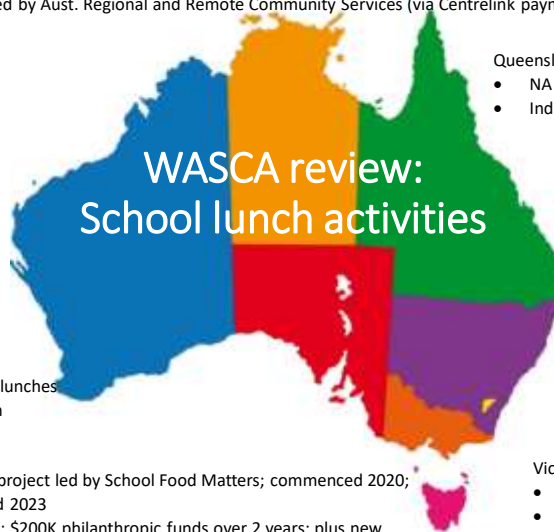
- Hungry for Change report
- WASCA environmental scan; literature review; stakeholder meetings; seeking funding to progress this work

South Australia

- Commissioner for children in interested in school lunches
- Flinders Uni research; including parent perception
- Potential pilot

Tasmania

- School lunch pilot project led by School Food Matters; commenced 2020; 30 schools involved 2023
- \$1.87M govt funds; \$200K philanthropic funds over 2 years; plus new funds for economic scoping



Queensland

- NA government led
- Individual schools activities

New South Wales

- NA government led
- Individual schools activities

Australian Capital Territory

- Meals at school trial 2024
- \$1.4million govt. funding
- Co-design; n=5 schools

Victoria

- NA government led
- Individual schools activities

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Tasmania – pilot

- Coordinated by School Food Matters
- 3 schools initial pilot; expanded to 15 in 2022 and another 15 in 2023
- Mode of delivery decided by the school
 - Centralised model: main component prepared by Loaves and Fishes and delivered to the school to be reheated and plated with a side dish prepared at school
 - Lunches from scratch using supplied recipes and ingredients
 - Lunches 1-3 days per week
 - Number of students range from one class, one year group, or the whole school

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Tasmania – pilot – n=15 schools

- During 2022
 - 78,832 nutritious cooked lunches to 1,678 Tasmanian students
 - ~75% of fresh produce was Tasmanian, exceeding the target of 50%
- Parents and staff witnessed a more positive attitude to food with students willing to try unfamiliar foods
- Positive flow on effect at home, willingness to sit down as a family for meals
- Students wanted more variety and more say in the food provided
- Most parents indicated a willingness to pay for school lunches ~\$3; support for discount for families that had more than one child
- **Challenges: parents still packing lunches 'just in case', allocated space for eating, staffing, suitable equipment, food allergies and intolerances**



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 <h2 style="text-align: center;">School Lunch Program</h2> <h3 style="text-align: center;">Term 3 Menu</h3> 			
	Main meal	+ Side or Dessert	
Tomato beans with cornbread + yogurt			Sweet and sour chicken with rice + fruit
Cottage pie with seasonal vegetables			Vegetable curry with rice + fruit and yogurt
Butter chicken with rice + fruit			Pasta bolognese with seasonal vegetables
Beef chow mein with noodles + banana & blueberry muffin			Chicken casserole with bread roll + fruit crumble and custard
Tuna pasta bake + fruit			Mexican mince with rice + yogurt

Note: Vegetarian options are available






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Do we need school meals in Australia?



Discussion paper, Flinders University, 2022

- Considerations
 - Feasibility: procurement, preparation and logistics
 - Acceptability: co-designed with stakeholders
 - Sustainability: economic, social and environmental sustainability
 - Governance: sectors responsible – local, state and national
- Benefits: nutrition, food security, reducing parental burden, school attendance and performance, food packaging and waste, job creation
- Challenges: family disempowerment, staff requirements, food quality and variety, meal and facility cost, how the model will be accessed
- Additional challenges: size of WA, cultural diversity, canteen and school facilities, skill set of staff, volunteer support, competing priorities in schools

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"... vegetables are so expensive that my family cannot cook a healthy meal..."
(yr 9 student)

"My family is a little bit poor... I will get food from the front office"
(yr 4 student)

My stomach hurts by I deal with it... we run out of food because we have a family of 8 and only my day works
(yr 7 student)

"There's no food in the house, no one can cook..."
(yr 8 student)

"Needs to be cheaper – too expensive up there (in community)"
(student)

"It's a 'no-brainer'; hungry kids cannot learn effectively"
(school principal)

Be aspirational in our health outcomes for students
(Teacher TAS school lunch program)