

# Kids – 'Go for your life'

21 July 2009

Ms Karen Ellingford  
Executive Officer  
Education and training Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring St  
East Melbourne 3002

Dear Ms Ellingford,

## **Parliamentary inquiry into the potential for developing opportunities for schools to become a focus for promoting healthy community living**

We welcome the abovementioned parliamentary inquiry and appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the key questions presented under the headings - specific health promotion programs, and the role of schools in promoting healthy community living.

### ***Specific health promotion programs***

#### *What health promotion program has your organisation run for schools?*

Kids – 'Go for your life' is the primary health promotion program focusing on children within the Victorian government's Go for your life initiative. The Kids – 'Go for your life' program, funded by the Victorian Government and managed by Diabetes Australia – Vic and Cancer Council Victoria, aims to improve healthy eating and physical activity levels of children and in doing so reduce the risk of overweight and obesity. To achieve this aim Kids – 'Go for your life' works with primary schools and early childhood services to support healthy eating and physical activity through an Award program. The Award program provides a comprehensive, yet simple, guide for schools and services to create healthy environments for children to enjoy being active and eating well every day. Schools and services join the program as Members and receive a range of free resources, training and support as they work through a number of criteria to improve their policies and practices and become Awarded. Once Awarded schools and services receive a sign for their front gate to show to their community their commitment to children's healthy eating and physical activity.

How successful has this program been?

Kids – 'Go for your life' currently works with over 925 primary schools across Victoria who have joined as Members of the program; this represents 55% of government primary schools, 40% of all catholic schools and 13% of all independent schools. Schools that are Members of Kids – 'Go for your life' are influencing the health behaviours of over 215,000 children, represented across 98% of all local government areas. These data demonstrate the acceptability and feasibility of the Kids – 'Go for your life' program to engage schools and create healthy changes to their policies and practises.

Kids – 'Go for your life' is currently being evaluated by the University of Melbourne to determine its affect on children's healthy eating and physical activity behaviours and, therefore, the program's success in reducing the risk of childhood overweight and obesity. This program is also being evaluated for its cost effectiveness. The results of these evaluations will be available after August 2009.

What health promotion program has your organisation run for the wider community?

To promote and support healthy eating and physical activity behaviours it is important to provide consistent messages for children and families throughout the broader community, including homes, child care services, schools, sporting and other community facilities, and support healthy choices by making these easy choices.

Kids – 'Go for your life' provides a comprehensive approach, based on sound evidence and best practise, to improve children's healthy eating and physical activity within the wider community by:

- Mobilising the support of over 400 health professionals across Victoria to work with primary schools and early childhood services to support them to become Members of the Award program and meet all Award criteria;
- Funding 10 local governments over 3 years to influence local action and policy change to positively affect children's healthy eating and physical activity levels; and
- Providing information to families to support healthy eating and physical activity in the home.

What other health promotion programs exist for schools?

Kids – 'Go for your life' partners with like-minded organisations that provide support to schools, and has signed memorandums of understandings with Nutrition Australia's Canteen Advisory Service, Home Economics Victoria's Fruit + Veg in Schools program and Bicycle Victoria's Ride2School program. Kids – 'Go for your life' provides an overarching framework for change and works closely with these programs to coordinate work across the school setting.

The Kids – 'Go for your life' program is leading other Australian states in its approach to improving healthy eating and physical activity levels through children's settings, such as primary schools. This is demonstrated by two other states licensing the program and implementing it within their jurisdiction.

## ***The role of schools in promoting healthy community living***

### *What is the role of schools in promoting healthy living in the wider community?*

To improve healthy eating and physical activity levels in the general population it is important to focus on children as an effective approach to early intervention. Children's settings, such as primary schools, are key places that can enhance healthy lifestyles. Schools provide an opportunity to; reach children from all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds; expose children to nutritional and physical activity opportunities; involve parents in nutrition and physical activity education; and involve stakeholders [i]. Therefore, this setting has a significant role to play in affecting children's health and is an important setting to work with to ensure a whole of community approach to health issues.

### *What models or mechanisms could schools use to promote healthy living?*

Evidence from multi-faceted interventions within schools using a Health Promoting Schools approach to increase healthy eating and physical activity behaviours in children show this is an effective approach [ii]. A Health Promoting Schools approach, endorsed internationally by the World Health Organisation and in Australia by the National Health and Medical Research Council, includes embedding healthy eating and physical activity within school policies, the schools' physical environment, curriculum and community links to ensure effectiveness and sustainability.

Built within the Health Promoting Schools approach, healthy award schemes have emerged. The award scheme has become popular among European countries to monitor systems and recognise achievement [iii] and is present in some Australian schools and early childhood services. The evaluation of award schemes, so far have demonstrated award-related changes related to children's health behaviours and the culture and organisation of schools [iv]. Award schemes provide a structured framework, health-related targets and provide external support.

The Victorian Kids – 'Go for your life' program effectively uses a Health Promoting Schools approach, within an award program, to engage and drive children's healthy eating and physical activity changes through primary schools and reduce the risk of overweight and obesity.

### *How could health, education and other organisations work together more effectively to coordinate health promotion activities between communities and schools?*

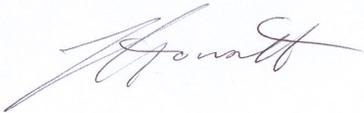
Based on feedback from schools, through the Kids – 'Go for your life' program, they are experiencing confusion and fatigue with the high number of programs and grants focusing on healthy eating and physical activity available e.g. Healthy Start Grants, Free Fruit Friday, Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden

funding to name a few. Therefore, it is recommend that future Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Department of Human Service funding and programs, focusing on healthy eating and physical activity within primary schools, be implemented within a consistent policy direction and are used to drive Kids – 'Go for your life' Membership and support schools achieving Award. This would lead to a more coordinated approach across Victoria; reduce confusion between programs; and lead to greater school engagement.

Greater Membership and achievement of the Kids – 'Go for your life' Award could also be promoted and supported by existing government staff, such as Student Health and Wellbeing Coordinators, School Nurses and Regional Education Directors. Utilising these existing roles to promote and support the program will lead to greater engagement of schools in the program and, therefore, greater outcomes for the health and wellbeing of Victorian children.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss this submission further.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Suzy Honisett  
Manager, Kids – 'Go for your life'

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i Montague M. Public Health Nutrition Policy in organised settings for children aged 0-12: An overview of policy, knowledge and interventions 2002 [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au).

ii Stewart-Browne S. What is the evidence in school health promotion in improving school health or preventing disease and specifically what is the effectiveness of the health promoting schools approach? World Health Organisation, Copenhagen. 2006 [http://www.chdf.org.au/i-cms\\_file?page=3/WHOHPSeffectivenessreport.pdf](http://www.chdf.org.au/i-cms_file?page=3/WHOHPSeffectivenessreport.pdf).

iii Rogers E et al. Developing the “health-promoting school” – a national survey of healthy school awards. *Public Health* 1998;**112**: 37-40.

iv Moon A.M. et al. Helping schools to become health promoting environments – an evaluation of the Wessex Healthy Schools Award. *Health Promotion Int* 1999;**14**:111-122.