DEVELOPING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOOLS TO BECOME A FOCUS FOR PROMOTING HEALTHY COMMUNITY LIVING

SA Health response to the Education and Training Committee Parliament of Victoria Inquiry

- The role of schools in promoting healthy community living.

School health promotion has evolved over the last 50 years and schools are now internationally recognised as critical settings for health promotion (WHO, March 2006).

Evidence indicates that comprehensive health promotion in schools approaches can make substantial positive contributions to children’s health and wellbeing. A comprehensive or whole school approach that encompasses quality health education together can build health protective factors and reduce risk taking behaviour.

Comprehensive health promotion in schools programs are more effective in changing health or health related behaviour when they are:

- Multifaceted
- Involve curriculum development, school environment and community activities
- Are sufficiently intensive and of long duration. (Stewart-Brown, 2006, WHO, 2008 [www.iuhpe.org]).

In South Australia a number of collaborative partnerships across Government; with non-government organisations, with health professionals and agencies, support the work of educators in schools and early childhood settings to promote healthy living and health literacy with their communities.

- Existing activities carried out by schools to promote holistic healthy living within their schools communities involving healthy eating, active lifestyles, sun smart awareness and appreciation of the effects of harmful substances.

Chess
Child and Student Education Support Services (Chess): is an interagency agreement signed by Chief Executives of each of the education sectors (Catholic, Independent and Department of Education and Children’s Services), SA Health, Aboriginal Health Council, Department for Families and Communities and the Chairperson of the South Australian Children’s Care and Education Forum. The aim of Chess is to provide safe and non- discriminatory education and health care for children and adolescents with physical and psychological health care needs.
This Agreement has resulted in many collaborative projects linked with training, research, health promotion and resource development. The Chess website, www.chess.sa.edu.au, reflects this collaboration and is indicative of the success and positive impact of this interagency initiative.

South Australian Health Literacy Alliance

Better Health Better Learning
Led from within SA Health by the Children’s Youth and Women’s Health Service (CYWHS), this statewide initiative is a capacity building, workforce development strategy designed to improve health promotion practice in education and care settings. Implemented through the Chess Health Promotion Taskforce this initiative aims to support organisational change to enhance health and learning outcomes.

Central to the initiative are the Better Health, Better Learning guidelines for health promotion with schools and preschools. The guidelines are supported by a practical checklist of issues and questions to consider when planning and reviewing joint health promotion work (located at www.wch.sa.gov.au/chp.html).

Active Travel –
SA Health has funded the Department for Transport Energy and Infrastructure to develop, implement and evaluate active travel initiatives (including walking and cycling options) in school and community settings.

The way2go program focuses on school aged children, their parents and families and aims to increase active travel, to and from schools and in the community. A literature review of international best practice has informed the development of a supporting resource which aligns with a health promoting schools approach (further information located at www.dtei.sa.gov.au/way2go/).

Crunch&Sip®
Led by SA Dental Health Service, this initiative supports the Go for 2&5® fruit and vegetable campaign. Schools implement a formal break allowing students to eat fruit and vegetables and drink water in the classroom. Western Australia and New South Wales also implement Crunch&Sip (further information located at www.crunchandsip.com.au).

Eat Well Be Active Community Programs
Led by Southern Adelaide Health Service and Country Health SA, this program supports healthy weight of children and young people (0-18 years) and their families using a whole-of-community approach.
This quasi-experimental control trial in Morphettvale and Murray Bridge is due to conclude in 2010. Partnerships have been established in a variety of settings including health, education, welfare, neighbourhoods, food supply, and media to address environmental and individual barriers to healthy eating and physical activity.

Consultation processes determine the key components of a coordinated community approach to promoting physical activity and healthy eating that are sustainable and transferable to other areas. Process and impact evaluation will determine the effectiveness of the community-wide initiatives to improve healthy eating and physical activity levels in the community. The learning from this program will inform the OPAL initiative (see below).


**Healthy Eating and Physical Activity: Early Years**

Led by the Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS), this program supports the professional learning, confidence and capacities of early years educators. Using site-based inquiry/improvement procedures directed to advancing the healthy eating habits and health-related physical activity patterns of children and their families, this initiative builds capacity for healthy life choices of children and their families.

**Eat Well Be Active - Primary Schools**

Eat Well Be Active-Primary Schools (EWBAPS) initiative is a curriculum based approach to promote healthy eating and physical activity in up to 200 primary schools. Using the professional development of teachers as the key methodology the following behaviours are promoted:

- Increased consumption of water, fruit and vegetables
- Decreased sedentary screen-based entertainment
- Decreased consumption of energy-dense nutrient-poor foods and drinks
- Increased physical activity levels.

The program focuses on whole school approaches including supportive social and physical environments.

**Premiers Be Active Challenge –**

Led by the DECS the *Premier’s be active Challenge* encourages physical activity for children and young people from reception to Year 9 in schools in the public, Catholic and independent sectors. The 10 week Challenge involves students accumulating at least 60 minutes moderate to vigorous activity on at least five days per week for the duration of the Challenge. Participating students and schools that support students to complete the 10 weeks of the Challenge receive an award recognising their efforts (further information located at [http://www.pbac.sa.edu.au/](http://www.pbac.sa.edu.au/)).
Right Bite Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy for SA Schools and Preschools –
Led by the DECS in close collaboration with the Department of Health, the Right Bite strategy assists South Australian schools and preschools to select, provide and promote food and drinks consistent with recommendations for healthy eating.

The Right Bite standards are mandatory for all DECS school canteens and vending machines and are encouraged wherever food and drinks are provided. Right Bite uses a coloured spectrum of GREEN, AMBER or RED which classifies food and drinks according to their nutritional value.

Start Right Eat Right
Led by the Department of Health, the Start Right Eat Right initiative is a nutrition award project that trains and accredits staff in Long Day Care Centres to improve the standard of nutrition, menus and food safety knowledge and practices of child care staff and ultimately the nutrition status of children in care.

Smarter than Smoking SA
Led by Drug and Alcohol Services SA (DASSA) within SA Health, the Smarter than Smoking project, aims to prevent young people from becoming or continuing to be smokers.

Programs in schools and communities raise awareness of educators to address tobacco issues with young people using a health promoting schools framework. Activities include the OxyGen web site, the Critics Choice competition, exemplars for curriculum activities for senior secondary years and National Youth Tobacco Free Day (further information is available at http://oxygen.org.au/).

Power Community Youth Program
Funded by SA Health, the Power Community Youth Program conducts healthy lifestyle lessons in schools with a focus on: smoking, nutrition and physical activity. This program works in partnership with the DECS.

Life Education SA Inc
Led by the DASSA, Life Education SA provides community supported drug and health preventative education resources to primary and secondary schools throughout South Australia. The programs are developed nationally, based on each jurisdiction’s curriculum framework. Children attend sessions designed to increase their knowledge and awareness of drug use issues, including tobacco. The program aims to promote a greater awareness and participation by the wider community in confronting the problems caused by inappropriate use of drugs.
Other DASSA Activities
DASSA supports school based tobacco, alcohol and other drug prevention strategies through the following activities:

- working in partnership with the Department of Children’s Services, Learner Wellbeing and Drug Strategy Team providing ongoing consultancy, policy advice and education support
- participating in the DECS Drug Strategy Drug Education Network, an informal network of agencies and services supporting and/or providing drug education in South Australian Schools
- assisting Encounter Youth with the coordination of Schoolies Week activities, through health, police and emergency services in order to minimise binge drinking and other harms by school leavers
- participating in the National Schoolies Forum to ensure evidence-based strategies from other jurisdictions can be identified and implemented at South Australian Schoolies events
- coordinating and monitoring the funding of Life Education SA to provide a drug education program to primary and secondary schools throughout the State
- providing specific support services to students, teachers and school counsellors through:
  - the DASSA Library and Resource Centre providing access to a range of print, online and multimedia materials that can assist staff and students within schools
  - The Alcohol and Drug Information Service providing a first point on contact for schools seeking to access information materials, brief advice or the location of nearby counselling services that may assist students or their families
  - the provision of counselling support services to students or their families
  - participating in DECS teacher training seminars.

Opportunities for linking with community leaders and forming partnerships with business and community organisations
How schools based activities could relate and coordinate to maximise impact and efficiency

OPAL
In March 2009, South Australian Minister for Health, the Hon John Hill MP, announced a joint Federal, State and Local Government five-year Obesity Prevention and Lifestyle (OPAL) initiative based on the French EPODE initiative (translated as, together we can prevent childhood obesity).

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Like the French program, OPAL is a multi-strategy community-based obesity prevention program which aims to increase healthy eating and physical activity of children, families and their communities. It will bring together existing and new initiatives developed in partnership with local communities. Local teams will work across sectors such as transport, planning, education, health, recreation and sport to influence the environment where children and families play, learn and work.

OPAL will be introduced to 20 communities within South Australia over the next five years, the first six sites - Cities of Onkaparinga, Marion, Playford, Salisbury, Mount Gambier and Port Augusta - have committed to an initial five year period, commencing late 2009. Each region will have an OPAL Manager situated within local government to drive activity and foster community partnerships. OPAL has a central coordination team within SA Health.

A Scientific Advisory Committee will ensure evidence based approaches and oversee the evaluation. In addition a multi-stakeholder Strategic Advisory Committee will inform the directions of the initiative.

**Smoking Prevention Initiatives**

A report commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing found that a well-developed and carefully implemented school education interventions have a crucial role to play in preventing youth smoking\(^2\). School based tobacco education programs, as part of a comprehensive tobacco control program, can play an important role in building the skills of young people to resist negative influences.

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\(^2\) Youth Tobacco Prevention Research Project, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, June 2005, Project number 3032, Eureka Strategic Research