

› Getting started

Forming a canteen committee or working party

It is important to engage support when first seeking to provide a healthy school food service. The school council, principal, canteen administrator, canteen staff (including paid and volunteer workers), the canteen committee, teachers and other staff, the school parent body, parents and students should all be involved in the process.

Forming a healthy canteen committee is an important first step in making the changes needed to provide healthy foods in schools. It not only allows the workload to be shared but also provides a wider forum to share different views and ideas. There may already be an existing canteen committee that may need to be reviewed and changed, or a new group may need to be established.

Who are canteen committee members?

It is important that the canteen committee is representative of the whole school community and should include the canteen manager (or staff) and a school council representative. Other members may include:

- teachers (for example, food technology, health or any other interested teachers)
- parents
- principal
- parents and friends association representatives
- student representatives
- local milk bar or grocer owners
- school nurse
- externally contracted caterers
- school community members interested in being involved.

When recruiting committee members, if possible target people with specific skills and knowledge in areas such as small business management, accounting, catering or nutrition. This also offers the advantage of greater networking opportunities and the contribution of a diverse range of skills.

What is the role of the canteen committee?

The initial role of the canteen committee is to develop a canteen policy and oversee canteen operations. The committee has an important role in gathering information on people's views and ideas so that the canteen policy developed is representative of the whole school community. Another role of the committee is to build awareness and knowledge among the wider school community of the issues associated with canteen policy development.

It is important to assign positions and tasks to individual committee members. People are more likely to feel responsible and motivated if they have an individual responsibility, and this creates a more productive committee. Positions to be formally assigned may include:

- chairperson who is responsible for running committee meetings
- deputy chairperson
- secretary who is responsible for distributing meeting agendas, minuting meetings and other administrative duties
- treasurer who is responsible for making payments and regularly comparing and checking financial records.

Assigning other committee members particular areas of responsibility creates efficiency as members become proficient in their responsibilities, for example allocating the responsibility of all communication tasks to one person. This also ensures a distribution of the workload.

How do I recruit committee members?

It is important to identify the number of committee members and the range of skills required before commencing recruiting. Developing a job description for committee positions clearly communicates the specific tasks and time commitment involved.

***HINT:** To encourage people to join and commit to this committee, be resourceful when recruiting. Advertise widely for interested people. The school newsletter is a good means of communication, but think of other places in the community such as the local shopping centre notice-board or RSL. Providing an incentive such as a lunch may also be helpful.*

Gathering advice, assistance and resources

There are many available sources of support and information about developing healthy canteens. Gathering relevant resources will help with the initial needs assessment and the policy development phase. Support to school canteens may be provided by:

- The 'Go for your life' Canteen Advisory Service: www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au
- organisations which offer specific training and professional development opportunities, such as Nutrition Australia and the Victorian Home Economics and Textiles Teachers' Association (VHETTA)
- state canteen associations that offer membership, websites, expos and professional development opportunities
- school canteens with an active healthy canteen policy that have been successful in implementing healthy changes
- local health services
- other nutrition and canteen websites
- financial sponsorship.

Resources initially required to assist with the needs assessment and policy development phase may include:

- sample canteen policies
- nutrition guidelines
- survey templates
- food safety information.

Resources that may be required on an ongoing basis to assist with planning and implementation may include:

- recipes
- menu templates
- food products
- marketing and promotional ideas.

Refer to the Information and resources section (pages 43–48) for a detailed list of recommended websites and resources.

HINT: Have a resources folder that is easy to access in the canteen to encourage reference and updating.

Engaging support

Forming a canteen committee that is representative of the school community is the initial step in ensuring a healthy canteen. The canteen committee can then generate support from the wider school community by increasing awareness of the relevant issues.

Raising awareness and knowledge

Raising awareness and knowledge while also engaging support are critical for the canteen committee and will need to be an ongoing focus throughout the change process. Initially, the focus will be on promoting the idea that providing healthy foods is a whole-school priority. It is possible that members of the school community need to become more aware of the connection between food, health and the role of the canteen in encouraging healthy food choices.

Distributing information on child nutrition and nutritional issues may be useful in the initial education and awareness-raising process as well as throughout the continuing operation of the canteen.

The following suggestions can be adapted at various stages. The canteen committee should:

- involve all groups from the start
- increase awareness of the link between food, health and the role of the canteen in encouraging healthy food choices
- increase awareness and knowledge of child nutrition and health
- raise awareness of particular areas of concern in the school regarding nutrition and health
- promote the idea that healthy foods in the school is a priority
- engage support for selling healthier foods in the school
- encourage acceptance and ownership of any changes to the canteen.

Who to target

Your target audience should include:

- key decision makers in the school, for example the principal and school council
- canteen staff and volunteers
- students
- school staff
- parents and families
- the wider community.

You can reach your target audience by:

- distributing the *School Canteens and Other School Food Services Policy* to teachers, school councils and parent associations
- requesting that discussion of the policy be an agenda item at teacher, staff or school council meetings
- distributing the background information provided in this resource
- ordering and disseminating free government publications such as *Food for Health*
- collecting and disseminating current and reputable information about nutrition and health through the provision of guest speakers, professional development for teachers and activities for the school community
- publishing an article in the school newsletter
- providing an article for the local media
- informally talking with the school community
- engaging the support of a high-profile community member to provide a statement for your newsletter.

These suggestions could be adapted to build awareness at various stages of the change process. For example, at this early stage, information distributed could focus on child nutrition issues and why canteens and foods provided in schools are important in promoting health. As awareness increases, the information provided could concentrate on communicating the specific changes and activities the school is making.

Assessing the current situation

The canteen committee, in consultation with the school community, will need to gather information and assess the school's current situation.

Questions to ask

- Is there an existing canteen policy that is still current, follows current guidelines and is being properly followed?
- Are there other school policies that are relevant to the canteen/school food service policy? Which other school policies may affect the operation of the canteen, for example school recycling or volunteers policy, and should they be linked into the canteen policy?
- What policy exists in the school concerning health and nutrition education? How is this policy implemented in the classroom? Are the canteen and classroom policies complementary?
- Why does the school have a canteen? What is the main purpose of the canteen as it exists currently? (This may not be established and the question may provide several different views.)
- Who currently makes key decisions regarding the school canteen?
- To what extent do parents, staff and students currently support the canteen, for example the number of lunches sold, the number of parents who work in the canteen and length of retainment of volunteers? With permission, students may be surveyed to ascertain how often they use the canteen and what they usually buy.

- What progress has previously been made in moving towards a healthier school canteen? What changes have been attempted in the past? Were these changes successful? If not, why not?
- What is the canteen's financial status?
- Analyse canteen sales, for example the number of lunches sold and the best-sellers of meals, drinks and snacks. This may require a sales audit to record lunch orders and sales over a fortnight or month.
- What is the history and length of retainment of volunteers?
- What other foods are offered in the school, for example, fundraisers, fetes or excursions? How does this affect the canteen?
- Assess the current menu. (See page 13.)

Gathering school community opinion

It is important that the opinions of all sections of the school community are clearly understood before any significant change is implemented.

Questions to ask

- What do students perceive as the popular and non-popular menu items?
- What is the level of parent, staff and student support for the school food services?
- What are the school community views of the existing canteen service?
- How would the school's community view a change towards a healthier canteen?
- What is the purpose of the current canteen services? Is it to offer the school community a service or is it a fundraising source?
- What is the current level of satisfaction with the present school food services? What perceptions exist about how healthy the food is and the variety of the available food? What are the views about the hours of operation, ordering procedures and the canteen's role at other school functions such as excursions and sports days?
- What would students, parents and teachers like to see changed in the school canteen? Are there any suggestions for healthy changes?

This information can be collected in several ways.

- Survey the school community:
 - Students could help design and collate a student survey as part of a learning activity. There are many example canteen surveys available. Refer to the websites listed in the Information and resources section of this manual for some examples.
 - A separate teacher survey could be conducted.
 - A suggestion box could be placed in the canteen, at the front reception desk and in the staff room.
 - A survey for parents could be included in the school newsletter.
 - Surveys could be given to selected classes to complete in class with their teacher.
- Initiate discussions with the school council, parents and friends association, teaching staff or the school nurse. These discussions may be informal, or a request can be made to present background information, propose ideas and gather feedback at a meeting or in another formal setting.
- Make a note of informal feedback and ideas that students offer in conversations at the canteen counter when being served.

The Canteen Assessment Activity on the following pages is a useful tool to use with the canteen committee. It helps to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the canteen across areas of the Health Promoting Schools Framework. The checklist can be copied and used at a committee planning meeting. While some of the areas on the checklist may not be relevant to all schools, they are a useful guide. Answers to all the questions may not be able to be completed initially by the committee and may require further research and consultation.

At this stage, it may be possible to develop a vision or goal statement for the canteen to describe the type of canteen the school community wants.

Assessing the canteen menu

Before assessing the current canteen menu, it is advisable to become familiar with the 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Food Planner, the *Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia* and the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*.

HINT: Use three different-coloured highlighters to highlight the foods on a copy of the menu according to what category they fall into. This will provide a good visual idea of the mix or proportion of foods on the menu fitting into each of the three categories.

You should also:

- use the 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Food Planner to classify which category canteen foods fall into – Everyday, Select Carefully or Occasionally
- take into account serve sizes when assessing which category foods fall into
- consider ingredients used in homemade recipes when assessing your menu – you will need to have exact recipes and food product labels present to help when assessing the menu
- check the mix of items on the menu. Is the proportion of Everyday (green) foods higher for lunch, snacks and drinks?
- check if the menu offers a range of foods from all food groups, that is, breads, cereals, rice, pasta and noodles, vegetables, fruit, dairy, meat and meat alternatives.

HINT: Students could assist with this menu assessment as part of their curriculum activities. The 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Student Learning Activities that accompany this resource will assist teachers to plan a classroom canteen menu assessment activity.

Assessing the canteen

The Canteen Assessment Activity on pages 15–19 is a useful tool for the canteen committee to use to ascertain the current situation. Use the Health Promoting Schools Framework to help identify the canteen’s strengths and weaknesses. The activity may also assist in identifying issues which may have been overlooked, or spark new ideas to make improvements.

The Canteen Assessment Activity could be completed at a canteen committee meeting. Using information gathered, answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to each question. Answers to all the questions may not be available and may require further research and consultation. Some questions might not be relevant.

The Action Required column should be completed for the ‘no’ responses. Initially, these ideas may be broad or general and may require further discussion and elaboration before planning specific initiatives and activities to address the areas of concern.

Canteen Assessment Activity example

	YES	NO	ACTION REQUIRED
Are healthy choices easy choices, for example, conveniently placed and always available with no waiting time?		✓	Sandwiches are currently pre-order only. Trial preparing and displaying a selection of ready-to-go sandwiches and wraps for sale over the counter at lunchtime.
Is the management and planning of the canteen’s volunteers perceived to be run effectively and successfully?		✓	Difficulty with recruiting of volunteers. Advertise more widely, for example, try the local Senior Citizens’ Club.



Canteen Assessment Activity

	YES	NO	ACTION REQUIRED
General questions			
Is the canteen committee representative of the whole school community and committed to the promotion of healthy foods in schools?			
Does the school have a canteen policy? If yes, is this policy being implemented and followed?			
Is the canteen policy regularly reviewed and updated?			
Does the school canteen menu reflect the <i>Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia</i> ? Refer to page 3 of the 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Food Planner.			
Does the school canteen sell foods in line with the 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Food Planner?			
Does the canteen committee positively promote healthy foods and new initiatives or changes that are to be made to the canteen?			
Does the canteen involve students, the school community and the wider community in decision making?			

	YES	NO	ACTION REQUIRED
<p>The canteen staff and volunteers</p> <p>Refer to page 35 of the <i>'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Canteen Manual</i> for more information and ideas.</p>			
Are the canteen manager and staff informed and aware of the canteen policy, and decisions and discussions held by the canteen committee?			
Are all canteen staff aware of and have access to the information provided in this resource?			
Are canteen staff informed of relevant school activities, such as school events, functions, curriculum days and school excursions?			
Do canteen staff and volunteers have the opportunity to receive training or professional development?			
Are recognition and incentives offered to canteen volunteers?			
Is the management and planning of the canteen's volunteers perceived to be run effectively and successfully?			
<p>The canteen menu</p> <p>Refer to the <i>'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Canteen Manual</i>, and the <i>'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Food Planner</i> for more information and ideas on creating a healthy canteen menu.</p>			
Have deep-fried foods and high-fat options that have minimal nutritional value, such as dim sims, pies and hot dogs been eliminated from the menu?			
Are fruit and vegetables offered daily on the menu (on their own or as a recipe ingredient)?			
Is produce of high quality, particularly fruit and vegetables?			
Are snack foods with minimal nutritional value being sold?			

	YES	NO	ACTION REQUIRED
Are healthy snack foods offered?			
Have soft drinks been removed from the canteen menu?			
Has confectionery been removed from the canteen menu?			
Are Everyday drinks the main drinks on offer, for example, water or low-fat plain milk?			
Are healthy choices easy choices, for example conveniently placed and always available with no waiting time?			
Are healthy choices listed first on the menu?			
Does the canteen offer a summer and winter menu?			
Financial Refer to page 33 of the <i>'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Canteen Manual</i> for more information on financial management.			
Does the canteen keep accurate financial records?			
Does the canteen accurately price menu items, for example, allowing for all ingredients and packaging when calculating the price of food and ensuring correct mark-ups on pre-packaged products?			
Does the canteen have a supplier who offers competitive prices and keeps them well-informed of specials and seasonal availability? (Refer to page 31 of the <i>'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Canteen Manual</i>).			
The canteen layout Refer to page 36 of the <i>'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Canteen Manual</i> for more information and ideas on creating a positive canteen environment.			
Is the canteen friendly, positive, bright, enticing and easily accessible?			
Does the canteen menu or specials board promote healthier choices, for example, listing healthy options in bold, bright letters?			

	YES	NO	ACTION REQUIRED
<p>Promotion and marketing</p> <p>Refer to page 38 of the 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Canteen Manual for more information and ideas on promotion and marketing of healthy canteens.</p>			
Does the canteen actively promote a healthy eating philosophy?			
Are healthy food items on the menu heavily promoted and marketed?			
Are unhealthier, less nutritious products banned from being promoted and marketed by the canteen?			
Are healthy choices prominently placed in the canteen, for example, are healthy choices placed at the cash register?			
Are less healthy choices placed less prominently in the canteen?			
Are healthy choices presented in an appealing way?			
Does the canteen trial new healthy options regularly to promote variety and increase sales of these items?			
Are healthy canteen choices sold at competitive prices.			
Does the canteen promote healthy choices by offering specials, meal deals or participation in theme days and awareness weeks?			
<p>Food safety and hygiene</p> <p>Refer to page 25 of the 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Canteen Manual for more information and ideas on food safety and hygiene.</p>			
Does the canteen have a registered food safety and hygiene plan that is regularly audited and followed by all canteen staff?			
Has a canteen staff member undertaken food safety supervisor training?			

	YES	NO	ACTION REQUIRED
Classroom links			
Refer to 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Student Learning Activities for more information and ideas on linking the canteen's values with the school curriculum.			
Does the canteen policy support and align with nutrition education in the classroom, for example, linking with subjects like history or special projects like cultural themes?			
Fundraising			
Refer to page 40 of this resource for more information and ideas on healthy fundraising.			
Are healthy alternatives to traditional fundraising ideas used?			
Catering and other food services in the school			
Refer to 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Food Planner for more information and ideas.			
Is catering and other food provision in the school in line with the canteen policy, the <i>School Canteens and Other School Food Services Policy</i> and the <i>Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia</i> for example, catering for staff meetings, events or excursions?			
Have all unhealthy foods and drinks of minimal nutritional value been removed from vending machines located on school premises?			
The environment			
Is packaging of menu items minimised and/or environmentally friendly?			
Is there a simple system for recycling solid waste from the canteen?			
Does the canteen link in with a school vegetable garden and relevant classroom activities?			