

## Climate Health WA Inquiry

### About your submission

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation or group?

No

Yes

If yes, please identify the organisation:

### Your contact details

The following information will not be published without your permission but enables the Inquiry to contact you about your submission if required.

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### Publication of submissions

Submissions will be published with the name of the submitter unless otherwise indicated below. Do you consent to be identified in the published submission?

Yes, I / my organisation agree to be identified

No, I / my organisation request to remain anonymous

### Terms of Reference

You are encouraged to address at least ONE of the Terms of Reference as listed below. Please select which item/s you will address:

1. Establish current knowledge on the implications of climate change for health in Western Australia (WA) and recommend a framework for evaluating future implications.

2. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will protect the public from the harmful health impacts of climate change.

3. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will strengthen the preparedness and

resilience of communities and health services against extreme weather events, with a focus on the most vulnerable in the community.

- 4. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will reduce the contribution of WA health services to climate change and other detrimental impacts.
- 5. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will enable WA Health services to implement change, including energy efficiency, to a more sustainable model.
- 6. Evaluate the likely benefits (health and wellbeing, social and economic) arising from climate change mitigation strategies, with a focus on WA health services.
- 7. Define the role of the Department of Health in leading public policy on climate change and health.
- 8. Recommend the Terms of Reference, scope and preferred methods for undertaking a climate change vulnerability assessment for the health sector.
- 9. Recommend the Terms of Reference, scope and preferred methods for developing a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the health sector.

#### **Submissions response field**

**Please type your response to the item(s) selected above into the field below. Alternatively you may provide your submission as a separate attachment (suggested maximum 5 pages).**

Early childhood is a crucial time for formation of dietary behaviour and for healthy brain development. A formative environment for many Australian children are Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings. With 1.3 million Australian children projected to attend Early Childhood Education and Care in 2019-20, these settings are formative (Richardson, IBIS report, 2019; Department of Education and Training, 2017). ECEC settings shape children's food preferences and habits, by imparting norms about eating and food (Devine et al., 2019). Moreover, better early years nutrition is associated with greater cognitive development in children and adolescents (Nyaradi et al, 2013) . However, there are some challenges that prevent ECEC settings from realising their potential to nurture healthy eating habits and supporting cognitive development (Wallace et al., 2017a).

In many childcare centres, there is an over-provision of discretionary foods and refined carbohydrates, and an under-provision of core food groups including vegetables, dairy and meat/meat alternatives (Wallace et al., 2017b). Of the core food groups, there is an over-provision of refined grains and cereals, and fruit. This can displace other core food groups and can lead to nutritional deficiencies and reduced exposure to a variety of foods (Sambell et al., 2014). Furthermore, amongst childcare workers, there is a poor understanding of nutrition (Devine et al., 2019). This is compounded by the lack of accredited training prioritising nutrition that ECEC staff receive.

What is concerning is that overweight and obesity is more frequently observed amongst children attending ECEC compared to those in parental care (Alberdi et

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al., 2016). Childhood obesity, once established, is difficult to reverse and therefore, obese children are more likely to be obese adults, subsequently increasing the risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 Diabetes, and some cancers (Kelsey, Zaepfel, Bjornstad, & Nadeau, 2014). Therefore the ECEC environment is an entry point for interventions that can influence children's lifelong eating habits and health outcomes (Briley & McAllaster, 2011) but is underutilised and requires more oversight to improve efforts towards a healthy food environment.

ECU Strategic Initiative Funds provided start-up funds to build SNAC as part of a PHD program and successful Healthway funding in 2014, provided additional resources for inclusion of teaching and learning materials for child and parent food and nutrition education and healthy food environments. This increased the development of SNAC and linkages to other ECU educational platforms such as Refresh.ED programs.

Dairy Australia, Early Childhood Australia, Child Australia, Grains and Legumes Council and the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) who are the early years national accrediting body, have supported the SNAC platform by way of sponsorship, joint education, reciprocal website links and promotion. However, there has been little leadership or funded support from WA Health in this sector for more than a decade and the National Request for a Child Care Healthy Lifestyle Program as part of the WA Healthy Children Program in 2012 was not funded.

Similar to the Refresh.ED program the curriculum content for the early years sector could include early introduction to agriculture, food and climate systems. This too requires continued professional development for early years educators relating to climate and agriculture content and its relation to the food system and health.

Furthermore, ECU staff have convened the National Nutrition Network – Early Childhood Education and Care (NNN-ECEC) which hosts 32 national and international members from universities or practitioner environments. This Network provides a unique opportunity to facilitate language and educational messaging to key stakeholders including ACECQA (accrediting bodies), government and non-government organisations that engage with this sector. The current body of work encompasses harmonisation of food environment guidelines and food environment policy scoping. This could inform future policy inclusions in readiness of the impact of climate change.

### **Recommendations for the WA Department of Health**

Invest and expand SNAC to include climate and agriculture content and its relation to the food system and health.

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Work with other departments (Education and Training and Community Services) to promote the platform more broadly to increase use in WA to educate community (children 0-4years and parents) about healthy food provision and healthy food environments in early years with a focus on impacts related to climate.

Provide funding to expand ECU online short courses (currently available for early year educators (SNACing101) and ACECQA assessors (SNACing 202)) to provide continued professional development for early years educators relating to climate and agriculture content and its relation to the food system and health.

Ensure all early years education services within the health services role model healthy food provision and healthy food environments.

Ensure all early years education services within the health services sector reduce food waste and reduce GHG emissions.

### References

Alberdi, G., McNamara, A., Lindsay, K., Scully, H., Horan, M., Gibney, E., & McAuliffe, F. (2016). The association between childcare and risk of childhood overweight and obesity in children aged 5 years and under: A systematic review. *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 175(10), 1277-1294.

Briley M, McAllaster M. (2011). Nutrition and the child-care setting. *J Am Diet Ass.*, 111, (9): 1298-300.

Department of Education and Training. (2017). Early Childhood and Child Care in Summary (June Quarter, 2017). Retrieved from [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/eccc\\_in\\_summary\\_jun\\_quarter\\_2017.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/eccc_in_summary_jun_quarter_2017.pdf)

Devine, A., Wallace, R., Lo, J., Miller, M., Sambell, R., Costello, L., Lombardi, K., Veurink, S. (2019). Online programs build confidence and improve healthy eating messages in Early Years services. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1836939119833244>

Nyaradi, A., Li, J., Hickling, S., Foster, J., & Oddy, W. H. 2013 *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 7(March), 97. doi:10.3389/fnhum.2013.00097.

Richardson, A. (2019) IBIS World Industry Report Q8710, Child care services in Australia, IBISWorld

Sambell, R., Devine, A., & Lo, J. (2014). Does the food group provision in early years' education and care settings in metropolitan Perth, Western Australia, meet dietary requirements; and how can Home Economics support this? *Journal of the HEIA*, 21(2).

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Wallace, R., Devine, A., & Costello, L. (2017)a. Determining educators needs to support healthy eating environments in early childhood settings Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 42 (2), 20-28.

Wallace, R., Costello, L., & Devine, A. (2017)b. Over-provision of discretionary foods at childcare dilutes the nutritional quality of diets for children. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, 28 Feb, DOI: 10.1111/1753-6405.1265

**Please complete this sheet and submit with any attachments to: Climate Health WA Inquiry**