



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **New research: Primary school canteens outstrip secondary schools, but both need backing to meet nutrition guidelines**

As thousands of children head back to school for the second half of the school year, dietitians are calling for better support for school canteens to improve their 'marks' on the healthy food front.

The call comes as new research suggests less than one in four (22.5 per cent) school canteen menus are in line with healthy school canteen guidelines.

The Monash University and Deakin University study shows primary schools are doing better, at 30 per cent compliance, while secondary schools fall way behind, with just 15 per cent meeting guidelines.

The researchers reviewed canteen menus from 200 government schools in five states (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia).

Menus were compared to their respective state's guidelines, and categorised by the traffic light system: green ('eat everyday'), amber ('select carefully') and red ('select occasionally' or 'banned').

Researchers and Accredited Practising Dietitians Laura Ford and Marijke Adderley said while menus were largely made up of 'green' items (60 per cent), the range of 'red' unhealthy foods on offer let schools down.

"Encouraging steps are being made to improve the foods sold in Australia's school canteens, but our research highlights the need for increased support for canteens, to encourage more healthy options," said Ms Ford.

She said while each state or territory has canteen guidelines, they can be difficult to interpret, and it's up to the individual school canteen how closely these are followed, if at all.

"Our younger years are a pivotal time for growth, development, and the formation of healthy habits. School canteens should role model what a healthy food environment looks like as they're so visible and accessible to students.

"Exposing kids to healthy food can set them up for a lifetime of healthy eating habits, and these types of foods can have a huge impact on their energy and concentration levels," said Ms Adderley.

The research was recently presented at the Dietitians Association of Australia's National Conference in Hobart.

**ENDS**

**For further information or to organise an interview with Laura Ford or Marijke Adderley, contact Felicity Curtain, Dietitians Association of Australia, on 0409 661 920.**

**Note to Editors:** The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is the professional body representing dietitians nationally. Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) is the only national credential recognised by the Australian Government, Medicare, the Department of Veteran Affairs and most private health funds as the quality standard for nutrition and dietetics services in Australia. For more information visit [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au). For the Media section on the DAA website contains DAA's media releases and position on topical nutrition issues in the media.