



Review of the State Public Health Plan 2013

South Australia

February 2018

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is the national association of the dietetic profession with over 6000 members, and branches in each state and territory. DAA is a leader in nutrition and advocates for food and nutrition for healthier people and healthier nations. DAA appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the review of the State Public Health Plan for South Australia.

DAA interest in this consultation

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) wants all Australians to experience good health and wellbeing by eating good food and being physically active. There is evidence however that this is not the case for many people, and that more investment is needed in state government led initiatives to promote population health and to protect vulnerable groups in the community.

Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) contribute to the health and nutrition literacy of Australians by leading population health programs and community initiatives, by supporting individuals through medical nutrition therapy, and by working with other stakeholders in the public, private and non-government sectors.

How familiar are you with the State Public Health Act and its purpose?

DAA has members based in South Australia who advocate for the protection and improvement of nutritional health and wellbeing for people living in South Australia (SA) and who implement strategies for healthy eating opportunities across Local Governments and many other sectors.

Feedback on the strategic priorities

Food and nutrition considerations are relevant across all areas of the four strategic priorities identified in the State Public Health Plan. Here follows feedback on two of the four priorities outlined in the Plan.

Increasing Opportunities for Healthy Living, Healthy Eating and Being Active

This strategic priority is imperative to the health and wellbeing of the community. National and international evidence supports the need for strategies in this area of interest. State and Commonwealth government health departments have important roles to support the implementation of such strategies. The SA Public Health Plan identified that Local Governments might also act to protect and improve community health and wellbeing in collaboration with other stakeholders.

OPAL

DAA is aware that the Obesity Prevention and Lifestyle (OPAL) program was planned as a joint Australian Government, South Australian Government and Local Government program to be funded from 2008-2017. In 2014, part way through the program, the Australian Government terminated the National Partnerships Agreement on Preventative Health (NPAPH) and withdrew funding to the OPAL program and evaluation. Despite the loss of Australian Government funding in 2014, a few Local Governments continued implementing a much reduced OPAL program, delivered by one or two project officers in four councils.

The OPAL Evaluation was staggered over four Phases with data collected for Phase 1 and 2 in late 2011-mid 2012, Phase 3 in late 2012, and Phase 4 in 2013. As a result of significant budget cuts to the program, the OPAL evaluation concluded prematurely in mid-2015 without public release of evaluation of Phase 3 and 4. The [OPAL Evaluation Project Final Report](#) and [Summary Report](#) (which evaluated Phase 1 and 2 communities only) revealed the scaled down OPAL program did not produce any significant changes in the proportion of children of healthy weight over time in OPAL communities, although we suggest that even with excellent planning and implementation a longer time frame would be needed to change this particular indicator.

It is unacceptable that full assessment of the value of the OPAL investment has not been available, and the outcomes and lessons from the Project are not accessible to inform future public health endeavours.

Healthy Workers – Healthy Futures

Another program introduced in the time of the SA Public Health Plan is the Healthy Workers Healthy Futures program which encourages workplaces to create working environments that support employees to increase physical activity, improve nutrition, decrease smoking rates, reduce harmful alcohol consumption, and improve mental and emotional wellbeing. We understand however that this federally-funded initiative in SA has not been adequately supported at a local level and will finish in June 2018 with no commitment to future funding.

Eat Well – Be Active

‘Eat Well - Be Active’ (EWBA) Healthy Weight Strategy 2011-2016 and the supporting departments within SA Health and Community Health are also relevant to the SA Public Health Plan. However, the decommissioning of the EWBA state-wide strategy saw a loss of highly skilled workers in 2016 with no plans to develop a new directional document.

Reduced workforce

DAA has been made aware by dietitians based in SA that following the McCann Review in 2013, almost all of the 18 state-wide nutrition and physical active multi-strategy, state-wide programs were defunded. As a consequence, almost every preventative nutrition and physical activity related initiative ceased as of June 2013, affecting every level and setting of the community.

This has resulted in reduced capacity for SA Health to develop and recommend policy and regulatory responses required by the Public Health Plan. There are currently only three remaining nutrition positions within SA Health, with one position ceasing in June 2018 as the 'Healthy Workers – Healthy Futures' project finishes.

Local Government capacity

While the vision expressed in the Plan was to increase the capacity of the State to protect, improve and promote health, the evidence is that the opposite has occurred with a progressive dismantling of structures. Local Governments and NGOs were expected to fill this gap, yet four years later there is very limited evidence that Local Governments or NGOs have been able to do this to any extent. NGOs have other priorities and struggle financially to meet their core obligations.

Flinders University has supported some nutrition-related strategies through dietetic student placements in the Councils, but this has ceased with the largest Council in SA as nutrition-related initiatives are not perceived as core services.

Rather than building long term programs, Local Governments have recalibrated to short-term strategies alleviating food insecurity. The community is the biggest loser due to the lack of support and resources for nutrition-related initiatives despite the high prevalence of non-communicable disease.

Policy commitment and resources needed

Increasing opportunities for healthy eating in South Australia requires public health nutrition policy commitment consistent with the recommendations of the ['Scoping Study to Inform Development of the National Nutrition Policy for Australia'](#).

Achieving outcomes from realistic policy commitments will require an adequately skilled workforce of public health dietitians to develop, implement and evaluate strategies within the community to eat well, aligned with the Australian Dietary Guidelines. SA Health supporting administrative structures are also needed to achieve opportunities for healthy eating and healthy living.

In relation to 'increasing opportunities for healthy living, healthy eating and being active, DAA recommends:

- political commitment to invest in improving population nutrition and preventive health. This means the mobilisation of political systems and institutions, adopting policies, allocating resources and coordinating responses for as long as necessary to ensure results (1).
- development and implementation of a state-wide nutrition and physical activity plan in SA, given the ‘Eat Well Be Active’ (EWBA) strategy finished in 2016
- State and Local Government investment in human resources (i.e. skilled staff with public health nutrition knowledge) to achieve the strategic priority of increasing opportunities for healthy eating through access to healthy food in the community.

Preparing for Climate Change

In view of climate change, public health policy should recognise the relationships between food production and waste disposal and generation of green-house gas emissions. Future iterations of the South Australia Public Health Plan should implement strategies to address these issues given that food waste in Australian landfills is the second largest source of methane, and a high percentage of municipal food and green waste goes to landfill.

Dietitians in SA report that there are already some initiatives in place in some areas to divert food and green waste away from landfill, but there is scope for improvement in other areas (2).

What aspects of the Plan have been useful to your work?

DAA members based in SA report that the SA Health Plan has been used to advocate for supporting nutrition and physical activity related initiatives, particularly those initiatives that are feasible within Local Governments. The Plan has also been used as a teaching tool for the next generation of tertiary-educated health professionals, although not always as a how-to, but rather as a lesson in how-not-to implement public health policy.

What aspects were not useful?

Despite legislation, planning and reporting processes, the State Public Health Plan has relied on voluntary ‘buy-in’ by organisations. and has lacked resourcing to achieve the Vision described in the Plan.

DAA would like see to political commitment and action to improve the nutrition, health and wellbeing of residents living in South Australia by applying a credible policy framework, such as the [NOURISHING framework](#) (3). The NOURISHING framework highlights where governments need to take action to promote healthy diets and reduce

overweight and obesity. The framework brings together ten policy areas across three domains: food environment, food system and behavior change communication. The framework is accompanied by a regularly updated database (last updated 18 October 2017), providing an extensive overview of implemented government policy actions from around the world.

References:

1. Baker P, Hawkes C, Wingrove K, Demaio AR, Parkhurst J, Thow AM, Walls H. What drives political commitment for nutrition? A review and framework synthesis to inform the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition. *BMJ Glob Health* 2018;0:e000485. doi:10.1136/bmjgh-2017-000485. Available from: <http://gh.bmj.com/content/bmjgh/3/1/e000485.full.pdf>
2. Local Government Region of South Australia. Municipal organics management in regional Australia. Final report, April 2015. Available from: <http://www.lga.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/project/2013.36%20-%20The%20collection%20and%20processing%20of%20food%20and%20garden%20organics%20by%20rural%20Councils%20in%20South%20Australia%20-%20FINAL%20REPORT.pdf>
3. Hawkes C, Jewell J, Allen K. A food policy package for healthy diets and the prevention of obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases: the NOURISHING framework. *Obesity Reviews*, Volume 14, Issue S2, November 2013, Pages 159–168. Available from: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/obr.12098/full>