

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

In Australia, the burden of overweight and obesity is high, resulting in social and economic costs to society. By intervening on a variety of settings, we can improve healthy eating and physical activity across the population.



Workplaces represent one setting where interventions can be implemented. Teachers represent a broad cross-section of our community while acting as role models for future generations.



Supporting teachers to pursue healthy eating and physical activity provides an opportunity to both improve the health of teachers themselves, and to provide positive examples for healthy eating and physical activity amongst students and the broader school community.



In this study we aimed to identify staff-perceived barriers to healthy eating and physical activity and to conclude on potential strategies and tools for supporting staff to pursue these healthier behaviours.

WHAT DID WE DO?



We recruited 11 schools to participate in our study. These included primary and secondary schools and schools from more socioeconomically advantaged and disadvantaged areas



From these schools, we recruited 3-12 staff members to participate in a focus group discussion concerning staff-perceived factors supporting and limiting healthy eating and physical activity in the school.



At each school we performed an environmental walkthrough of the 'Checklist for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity in the Workplace' audit tool.

The role of Leadership,
including; making staff health
and wellbeing a priority,
surveying staff needs and
communicating the availability
of health resources

Workplace culture; including a
culture of support for healthy
eating and physical activity



THEMES EMERGING FROM DISCUSSION WITH SCHOOL STAFF

Workplace stressors, such
as time and workload

Available initiatives and
opportunities, such as
group classes and
educational opportunities

The physical environment,
including; access to physical
activity facilities and food
preparation spaces, and the
food available at the school

"We're on the go all the time and sometimes we do skip meals because we're on the go and we skip playtime and we're getting things ready in our classroom or we're getting something to somebody else."

(Focus Group 9)

"I know that there's schools that have a personal trainer come in and do a session with staff that are interested."

(Focus group 3)



STAFF THOUGHTS

"... Leaders have always been supportive. So knowing that you can be healthy and take the time to be healthy sometimes when you need to is really helpful."

(Focus Group 5)

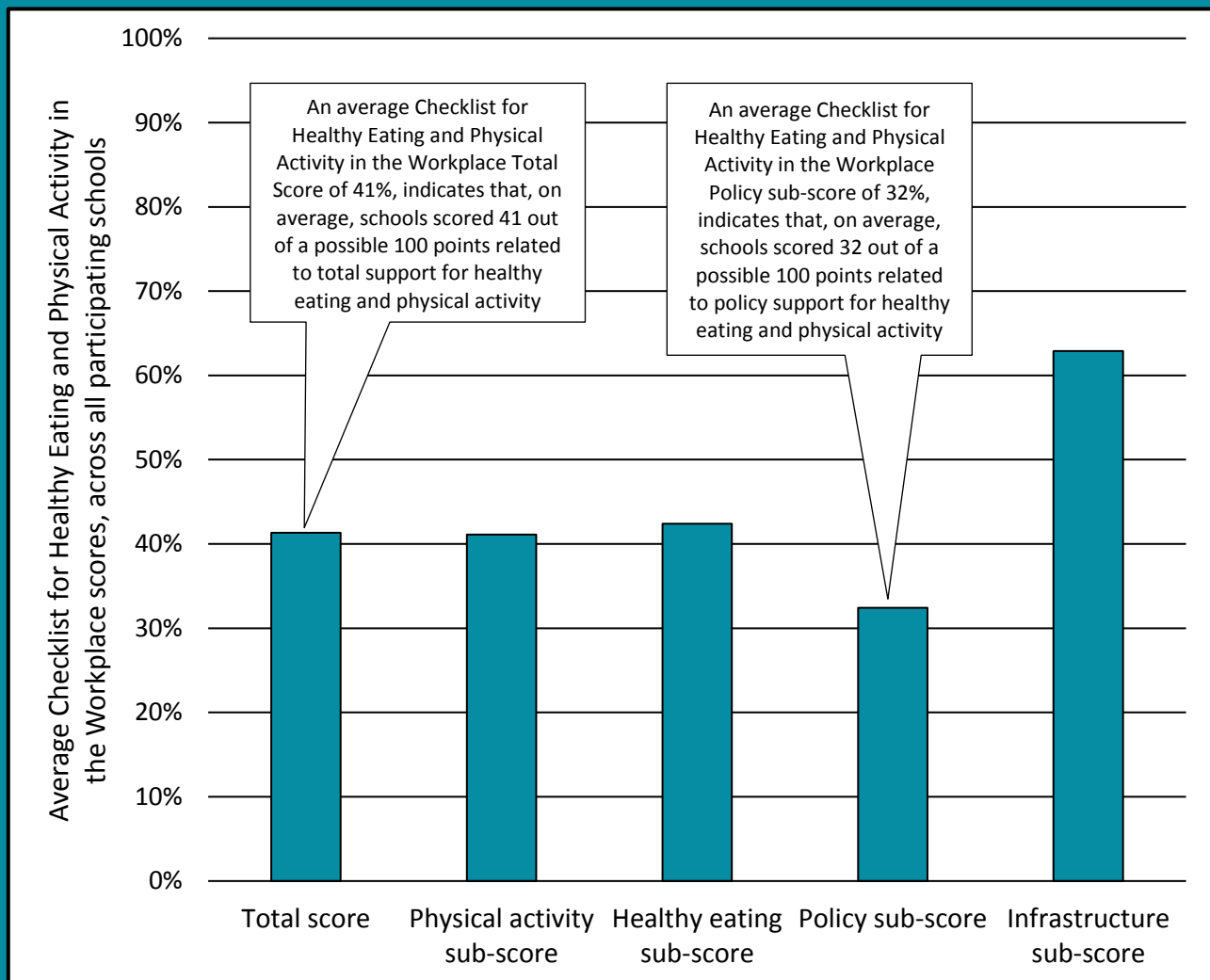
"And it's almost like because everyone eats healthy, if you didn't bring - you'd never think to not bring something healthy to lunch."

(Focus Group 4)

"I'd like them to provide more healthy options in a vending machine or somewhere because I often come in with good intentions of not eating much 'cause I'm trying to diet but then I get really hungry."

(Focus Group 1)

CHECKLIST FOR HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE RESULTS



Schools varied in how many items of the Checklist for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity in the Workplace they achieved, indicating feasibility of many policies and lots of room to improve



Across all participating schools, neither healthy eating nor physical activity was more supported than the other



All schools had more infrastructure support for healthy eating and physical activity than policy support for healthy eating and physical activity, indicating that policy could be one potential area for improvement

RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt a framework such as the Victorian Government's Achievement Program

Start with some easy wins like removing unhealthy vending and providing free fruit

Provide staff with access to school facilities at times which are convenient to them, and supply staff-specific changing facilities

Make the links between staff physical activity and healthy eating with mental health and wellbeing

Use an audit tool to support schools to make and monitor changes

Evaluate the effectiveness of implementing the Achievement Program or similar on staff health and wellbeing

FEELING INSPIRED? START HERE:

To read the full report, go [here](#).

To learn more about the Victorian Government's Achievement Program, go [here](#).

To get more ideas about healthy eating, go [here](#).



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