

Healthy Eating Advisory Service

Getting started guide: supporting long day care services

Health Promoter

Getting started guide

Supporting nutritious food environments in Victorian long day care services

Early childhood is a vital time in children's growth and development. Long day care services play an important part in supporting the health and wellbeing of children in their care. Eating habits are learned from a young age, so by supporting long day care services with providing nutritious foods and drinks, you can help children establish positive eating behaviours early.

This guide will help you navigate getting started with supporting long day care services in Victoria. It will provide an overview of the process involved and suggested steps to take when supporting early childhood service staff.



→ 01 Identify and engage with long day care services

Map local long day care services to identify opportunities for support. This includes understanding the food environment at each centre - if they provide meals, how many meals are served each day and any other relevant details. Reach out via email, phone or in-person visits to introduce yourself and your role.

Focus on building rapport with staff by showing genuine interest in their service and listening to their needs.

02 Assess needs and readiness

After engaging with the services and building a relationship with them, it is important to understand their organisations needs and readiness.

You can enquire about existing policies and procedures to gather more information. It is helpful to understand if management and all staff are on board with making changes to the menu, how budgets are allocated and how best to approach any changes you want to support the centre through.

Encouraging and highlighting the value of a whole service approach can ensure that staff work together and are supportive of all healthy eating practices in the centre.

In some centres, the menus might be planned and organised by a variety of staff members so it is important to get an understanding around the different responsibilities at the centre.

Other important considerations can include: mealtime environments, staff attitudes and family expectations.



03 Build cook and long day care staff capacity

Empower your cooks with knowledge and connection. Promote relevant training opportunities and share HEAS resources designed to make nutritious menus achievable.

Some relevant training to get started with includes:

- Planning a healthy menu in long day care
- Promoting healthy eating in long day care
- Managing allergies and other dietary requirements in children's education and care

Another great engagement tool, especially when supporting multiple centres, is to set up a Cooks Network or encourage cooks to join an existing network to provide an opportunity for them to share ideas, challenges and inspiration. Further details about Cooks Networks are available in Step 6.



04 Support development of a healthy eating policy

Facilitate discussions to guide the development of a healthy eating policy. Encourage input from all areas of the service to ensure a collaborative, whole service approach.

Key resources

- Develop a healthy eating policy
- Healthy eating and oral health policy checklist

05 Support menu planning and assessment

Making tasty, nutritious menus on a budget is easier with the right tools and support. Assist with menu assessments as needed using the Victorian Government's Menu planning guidelines for long day care which outline what to include on a nutritious menu for long day care.

Additional menu planning resources, including menu planning checklists, a getting started guide, ingredient quantity guides, food allergy factsheets, and meal and snack ideas, can be found in the resources section of the HEAS website.

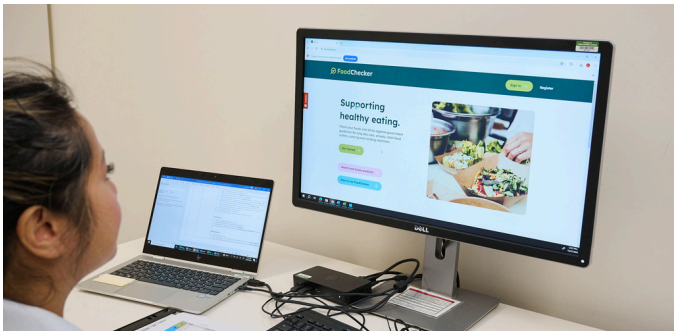
FoodChecker is an online tool which can be used to plan and assess a healthy menu according to the Menu planning guidelines for long day care.

FoodChecker

FoodChecker will provide a report highlighting if the service meets or does not meet the Menu planning guidelines for long day care. You can provide support in understanding the report and suggest appropriate revisions to help meet guidelines. Some centres may want additional support to do their FoodChecker assessments.

Victorian long day care centres registered with Healthy Places Healthy Futures and/or Smiles 4 Miles need to provide a FoodChecker menu assessment report that shows their menus meet Menu planning guidelines.

Try FoodChecker today.



06 Ongoing support and networking

Provide regular check-ins to maintain engagement and offer continued guidance. Share the latest HEAS updates and resources and encourage participation in Cooks Network meetings to support relationships and collaboration amongst cooks.

Cooks Network

Cooks Networks bring together local long day care cooks to share ideas, and build skills to align menu planning with the Menu planning guidelines.
A Cooks Network is a great opportunity to build stronger relationships with the long day care centres in your area.

The Cooks Connect toolkit is the place to start as it provides helpful information and advice when establishing your cooks network.

The toolkit provides a range of practical resources including a supporter kit, survey template, evaluation tool, certificate of attendance.

Once you're familiar with Cooks Connect and the toolkit, it's time to get started establishing your own Cooks Network. Once established, email the HEAS team so that we can promote your network on our Cooks Network directory. If you're looking for content to include in your newly established network, the HEAS team have pulled together all the resources you need to present a professional development session in your network.

You can find mini-professional development sessions in the Cooks Connect section of the HEAS website.

07 Celebrate and share success

Recognise achievements by sharing success stories which you can do during Cooks Network meetings. You can also support the development of case studies to showcase effective practices through HEAS communication channels.

Email the team with your success stories and learnings as we would be glad to highlight your success

When you celebrate progress, you build pride and motivation to continue providing nutritious meals in long day care.





We're here to support you

Visit our website:
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To receive this document in an accessible format phone 1300 22 52 88 or email heas@nnf.org.au

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