

Early Years Services – QA2.12 Nutrition, Healthy Eating and Oral Health

TRIM Reference: D15/32932 Due for Review: 6 August 2026
Responsible Officer: Coordinator Early Years

Purpose

This policy outlines Surf Coast Shire Council's commitment to providing and/or promoting the importance of healthy eating and good oral health behaviours within its Early Years services. This policy outlines our commitment to:

- Promote a healthy lifestyle to children, including eating nutritious food and drinks
- Encourage families to provide healthy food and drink choices
- Provide a positive and safe eating environment by role modelling healthy eating and good oral health behaviours
- Encourage children to make healthy lifestyle choices, which includes drinking water, eating healthy food and maintaining good oral health, consistent with the national and state guidelines and recommendations
- Ensure that the diverse dietary and cultural needs of children and families are taken into consideration when planning menus for service events and activities
- Communicate with parents about healthy eating and good oral health
- Encourage staff to learn more about healthy eating and good oral health

Policy Principles

Evidence of link to National Quality Standards: 2.1, 2.1.3, 2.2, 2.2.1, 7.1.1, 7.2.1

Evidence of link to Education and Care Services National Regulations: 77, 78, 79, 168(2) (a), 6.2

- [Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010](#)
- [Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011](#)
- [National Quality Standard](#)

Australian Dietary Guidelines

These guidelines provide information about the types and amounts of foods, food groups and dietary patterns that promote health and wellbeing and reduce the risk of diet-related diseases.

Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

This food selection guide visually represents the proportion of the five food groups recommended for consumption each day.

Get Up & Grow: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Early Childhood

Guidelines promote offering healthy food choices to children (whether food is provided in the setting or brought from home), while also encouraging children to eat to their own appetites, develop positive attitudes toward selecting food and enjoy eating.

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

Framework identifies eight Practice Principles for Learning and Development, which describe the most effective ways for early childhood professionals to work together and with children and families to facilitate learning and development.

National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care

The National Quality Framework (NQF) sets a national benchmark for early childhood education and care to ensure children enjoy the best possible conditions in developmental years.

Scope

Healthy Eating and Oral Health is an important aspect of a child's overall health and wellbeing, and we recognise the important role our services play in promoting and supporting healthy eating and good oral health behaviours. This policy is applicable to Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services, all educators, volunteers and children and families accessing these services.

Policy

Good oral health is fundamental to overall health and wellbeing. Without it, a person's general quality of life and the ability to eat, speak and socialise is compromised, resulting in pain, discomfort and embarrassment. The main oral health condition experienced by children is tooth decay, affecting over half of all Australian children, making it five times more prevalent than asthma. Tooth decay is Australia's most prevalent health problem despite being preventable.

Surf Coast Shire Early Years Services will:

- Promote nutritious food and eating/drinking behaviours that will contribute to healthy growth and development in children
- Consult and work collaboratively with families in regard to their child's nutrition, oral health and dietary requirements, including responding appropriately to food allergies and recognising cultural and religious practices, and lifestyle choices.
- Safe, fresh drinking water (preferably tap water) is readily available to all children at all times. Children are encouraged to drink water regularly by educators.
- Consistently and actively, promote and encourage the provision of a healthy, safe and varied diet of food and drinks that are nutritious and socially and culturally appropriate for each child.
- Ensure that age appropriate, adequate amounts of food and drinks (with water being the preferred choice) are available and offered on a regular basis throughout the day according to each child's nutritional requirements.
- Ensure all foods and drinks offered are safe and hygienic to minimise risks to children
- Ensure any specific cultural, religious or health requirements are considered when providing foods and drinks.
- Provide a supportive and safe environment to foster healthy eating behaviours for the future.
- Incorporate children's agency and decision-making into our educational program by planning meal times and other food-related experiences that enable this.
- Where children have known allergies and intolerances, products and food that cause allergic reactions will be taken into consideration and avoided where possible.
- Provide healthy eating and oral health information to families, such as information about accessing local dental services and how to create healthy and nutritious meals.
- Provide a list of preferred healthy foods and drinks for parents and carers to provide for children via emails, newsletters, Kinderloop and handouts.
- Ensure staff are educated and promote healthy food and drink within its Early Years services through role modelling healthy eating and good oral health behaviours.
- Ensure oral hygiene practices are promoted and undertaken at the service when appropriate.
- Educators are supported to maintain good oral health practices at work.
- Participate in Smiles 4 Miles program where possible
- Establish partnerships with relevant organisations and health professionals to support healthy eating and oral health practices, where appropriate.
- Ensure there is suitable space for breastfeeding and storing breastmilk.
- Ensure best practices are followed in relation to bottle feeding and sipper cups as outlined in the NHMRC Infant feeding guidelines

Bringing Food to the Service for Other Children to Consume

All family members and visitors to the service will check with the Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years' Service staff prior to bringing any food to be consumed by other children during the service's operations.

Special dietary needs (including food allergies and intolerance)

Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services will inform parents and carers prior to enrolment, what dietary support can be provided. This may include:

- Parents of children with individual medical dietary needs or allergies will be asked to provide a medical action plan written by a relevant health professional (eg. doctor, specialist, dietitian). The health care plan should include information about relevant medical conditions, emergency procedures and any nutrition intervention required and be no more than 12 months old.
- Parents of children with allergies will be asked to provide an allergy action plan from a relevant health professional - signed by the doctor and be within the current 12 months.
- The ability of the service to cater for special dietary needs is at the service's discretion.
- In some circumstances, parents and carers may be asked to provide some or all of the food and drinks required for their child. This will be further supported through documenting how you will prevent at-risk children from accessing foods and drinks that are not allowed on a Risk Minimisation and Communication Plan;
- Describing how staff members will be kept informed of procedures for dealing with allergies, specifically emergency procedures for allergic reactions.
- Outlining how information regarding allergies will be communicated to parents and families.
- Indicating where parents and staff can be directed to obtain more information about managing food allergies and intolerances.

Mealtime and the eating environment

Services will provide a health promoting, positive, safe and social eating environment. This will be achieved by:

- Staff and carers role modelling healthy eating behaviours.
For example, staff will:
 - sit with children during meal time and enjoy healthy food and drinks provide positive encouragement to children eating healthy food and drinks
 - promote positive discussion about the foods and drinks being served
 - promote a positive, relaxed, social eating environment with children
 - be encouraged to bring food and drinks from home in line with the service's staff health and wellbeing policy
 - avoid discussions about dieting, fad diets and body image.
- Implementing precautions to minimise the risk of choking, such as children being seated and supervised at mealtimes.
- Ensuring food is not used as a punishment, reward or incentive.
- Having procedures that support fussy eaters or natural appetite fluctuation.
- Ensuring celebrations, fundraising and events promote healthy food options and discourage discretionary/sometimes food options. Acknowledging and celebrating cultural food events and practices

Learning about food and nutrition

Services will provide opportunities for children to learn about food, healthy eating and oral health as recommended in the National Quality Standard, Belonging, Being and Becoming - The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

- The learning program will include food awareness activities, practical food preparation experiences and planned and spontaneous discussions about food.
- Mealtimes are seen as an opportunity for social learning and for teaching children about appropriate mealtime behaviours.
- Staff will access resources, tools and professional learning experiences to increase their knowledge and capacity to promote healthy eating.

Engaging and communicating with staff and educators

- Staff and educators are supported by having healthy food and drink options in the staff room, for staff meetings and for professional learning. Refer to your staff health and wellbeing policy
- Educators recognise that they are role models and are encouraged to bring foods and drinks that are in line with the service's nutrition and healthy eating policy
- Staff are provided with opportunities to update their training on healthy eating and develop the skills required to promote the service's nutrition and healthy eating policy.

Enrolment

Discussion and promotion of appropriate food with families on enrolment is essential in working out what/how/when food and drinks will be managed.

- During the enrolment process discussions will occur and information will be collected about children who have allergies/intolerances or other food choices and preferences.
- The relevant documentation; Anaphylaxis Management Plan and Risk Minimisation and Communication Plan; Allergy Action Plan (see Early Years Medical Conditions and Medication Policy), will be completed in consultation with the parent/guardian and the child's medical practitioner.
- Where food and drink is provided by the service, parents/guardians will be made aware of what food and drinks their children have consumed throughout the day.
- Families will be referred to the Nutrition, Healthy Eating and Oral Health Policy online on the Surf Coast Shire website and encouraged to become familiar with it
- As applicable, staff/educators will advise and forward required information to the relevant Early Years Services Team Leader.
(See also cultural tradition and religious beliefs below).

Participation in the Early Years' Service

Families and staff/educators will discuss and where appropriate document:

- How the policy will be implemented
- The child's routine and food requirements.
- All relevant documentation for any food induced allergies/intolerance or other food choices and preferences.
- The service will assist families to access specialist resources and professional advice in relation to the wellbeing of the child where this is indicated.

Cultural tradition and religious beliefs

Some families, depending on their cultural traditions or religious beliefs, may have different food customs than the staff/educators working in the setting.

- These customs might include what foods are eaten, how and when they are eaten, how different foods are prepared and what combinations of foods are eaten.
- Staff/educators will talk to families to ensure that their food preferences and customs can be respected in the setting. This may mean adjusting a child's food intake or snack time in the Service.

Food Safety

Refer to Early Years Health, hygiene and safe food Policy and Procedure

Oral Health Messages for the Australian Public:

- Breast milk is best for babies and is not associated with an increased risk of dental decay.
- A cup can be introduced at around six months, to teach infants the skill of sipping drinks from a cup.
- Put an infant to bed without a bottle or take the bottle away when the infant has finished feeding.
- Use an appropriate fluoride toothpaste (e.g. child's toothpaste) over the age of 18 months.
- Children should have an oral health assessment by the age of two.
- Brush teeth and along the gum line twice a day with a soft brush.
- Drink plenty of tap water (fluoridated if available).
- Limit sugary foods and drinks.
- Choose healthy snacks – fruits and vegetables.

Definitions

Healthy Eating: Eating a wide variety of foods from the five food groups each day:

- fruit
- vegetables and legumes/beans
- grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain
- milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives
- lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans.

Source: [Nutrition Australia Vic Division](#)

Oral Health

Oral health refers to the condition of a person's teeth and gums, as well as the health of the muscles and bones in their mouth.

Smiles 4 Miles

Smiles 4 Miles is an initiative delivered by Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV) which aims to improve the oral health of children and their families in high-risk areas across Victoria.

Tooth decay is Australia's most common health problem. Smiles 4 Miles assists early childhood services to encourage and promote good oral health habits and healthy eating among children in their care.

The program is delivered predominantly in preschools and is based on the World Health Organisation's Health Promoting Schools Framework, an internationally recognised best practice approach.

Nutrition: the process of providing or obtaining the food necessary for health and growth.

Source: [Oxford Dictionaries](#)

'Discretionary foods: 'Foods and drinks that are high in saturated fat, added sugar and salt or a combination of these. They typically have very little nutritional value, are energy dense and are often processed and packaged.

Related Procedure

Nil.

References

Related Surf Coast Shire Council and Early Years Services Policies

MPP018	Workplace Health & Safety Policy
D14/104807	Early Years Health, hygiene and safe food Policy
D15/16286	Early Years Access and Inclusion Policy
D15/35364	Early Years Sustainability Policy
D22/217989	Early Years Enrolment & Orientation Policy

Related Surf Coast Shire Council and Early Years Services Work Instructions and Forms

D14/28444	Early Years Breast Milk, Milk and Milk Formula Work Instructions
D17/30062	Early Years risk minimisation and communication plan

Other References

The National Quality Framework's healthy eating standard is supported by the:

- Australian Government Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Guidelines for Early Childhood Settings
- Get Up & Grow: Nutrition and Physical Activity for Early Childhood.
- Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia.
- *Eat for Health - Australian Dietary Guidelines Providing the scientific evidence for healthier Australian diets 2013*
- *Eat for Health - Infant Feeding Guidelines - Information for health workers*, Department of Health and Aging, 2012.
- Victorian Prevention and Health Promotion Achievement Program - *the Healthy Eating and Oral Health benchmark*.
- *Victorian Healthy Eating Advisory Service*

Education and Care Services National Law 2010

Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011

ACECQA National Quality Framework Resource Kit

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

My Time, Our Place

Australian Dietary Guidelines, National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013, <http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au>.

Smiles 4 Miles <https://www.dhsv.org.au/oral-health-programs/smiles4miles> Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health, 2011. Dental caries trends in Australian school children. Australian Dental Journal, Vol 56, pp 227–30.

Rogers J, Prevention and Population Health Branch, Government of Victoria, Department of Health, 2011, Evidence-based oral health promotion Resource

Document History

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