

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

28 March 2024

**Overcoming state disparities - Federation of Canteens in Schools Supercharges National Collaboration**

In response to the need for a concerted effort to prioritise the health and well-being of Australian school children, The Federation of Canteens in Schools (FOCIS) and many stakeholders working in the sector united for the first National School Network Meeting of 2024.

High on the agenda was providing a forum for knowledge sharing and cross-collaboration. Participants heard from initiatives and programs that partner with school canteens across the country to support the provision of healthy foods and encourage the adoption of healthy eating habits.

Leanne Elliston, FOCIS Chairperson said that fantastic things were happening in each of the jurisdictions across the country, from members working with canteens in low socio-economic areas to incorporate fruit breaks, to school children in regional areas opening and operating their very own school canteens offering to offering to healthy options to their peers.”

Each state and territory has differing policies to help parents and children identify healthier options, and while food audits and traffic light systems help; sustainable long-term change can only succeed through a whole-school approach that incorporates the broader community and involves students, parents, and teachers in the process.

“It is really important FOCIS provides a platform for unified discussion and a collaborative approach to the escalating challenges posed by childhood obesity, nutritional disparities, economic factors, and the overall well-being of our young generation.”

“The mission of FOCIS and canteen associations, networks, and its members is to share knowledge, deliver program updates, and start discussions around current trends, research, and what we can do together to meet the broader needs of young children and school canteen operators.”

“The movement to gravitate towards wholesome and nutritious meal options isn’t a quick one, especially when we are up against the marketing might of multi-national food companies with million-dollar campaigns.”

This is why coming together and leveraging ideas and opportunities through the National School Food Network is so important.

The meeting also featured a discussion on the need for a centralised database of how many school canteens are operating in the country, and the current limitations on transparency when it comes to school canteen menus.

Key rationales for the unified approach include:

**Strength in Numbers:** By holding regular National School Food Network meetings we come together, pool resources, share insights, and collectively address challenges associated with promoting healthy eating in schools.

**Advocacy for Systemic Change**: A united voice carries more weight when advocating for systemic changes. FOCIS works with canteen associations and networks to advocate for policy reforms at both state and federal levels, urging the implementation of measures that prioritise and support the well-being of school children. [FOCIS recently provided a submission to the Australian Government consultation on limiting unhealthy food marketing to children](https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn%3Aaaid%3Asc%3AAP%3A29dc940c-9afd-4b3a-9df2-f1f1bfa8548f).

**Efficient Resource Allocation:** The unity of FOCIS and its members through creating and sharing digital content and [online training resources](https://www.focis.com.au/training/) allows for more efficient allocation of resources, enabling joint initiatives, educational campaigns, and the development of educational modules aimed at empowering schools to implement and sustain healthy eating practices.

*How you can get involved:*

Support our initiatives by visiting our website [www.focis.com.au](http://www.focis.com.au).

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