

POLICY FUTURES

A Reform Agenda



Feeding Children Well: The importance of school lunches to education, health, and social outcomes, and impact on local food economies.

Countries around the world recognise school meals as a vital investment of the child and a positive impact on the national and local economy. Despite current food-based interventions in Australian schools, some children continue to perform poorly in health and education outcomes. An Australian approach based on proven overseas food programs that guarantees every child is provided a good meal at school is essential to improve learning and nutritional outcomes of Australian children.

Embracing school meals in Australia requires transformative change to the failing school meal system which currently exists. It requires federal policy and state commitments that deliver best practice of food in schools for all children, through co-investment and a coordinated effort across communities, public and private organisations, and government sectors, including education, health, agriculture, and community.

There is no reason why we can't feed all our children with Australian produced food that is nutritious, tasty, local, and seasonally sourced.

Julie Dunbabin
2018 Churchill Fellow (TAS)

Key Policy Recommendations

The National Cabinet should establish and facilitate a key stakeholder roundtable to:

1

- identify the benefits and challenges of a universal school lunch program through a whole-of-government policy approach, particularly education, health, community, and agriculture
- explore extending the Tasmanian School Lunch Project (2020–23) from a state project to a national program, serving nutritionally balanced, safely prepared meals on every school day to all students.

2

The National Cabinet should resource the implementation of current national policies, such as the *National Obesity Strategy (2022-2032)* and guides such as the *Good Practice Guide (2019)* that relate to school meals, through action plans and adequate funding.

3

The Federal Government should resource the implementation of the *2019 Good Practice Guide*, to shape the development, monitoring, and evaluation of a national school lunch program where food is procured locally and seasonally, increasing employment opportunities for our farmers.

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Why school meals?

 At least one third of a child's daily energy intake is consumed at school

94% of children don't eat the recommended vegetable intake, while **34%** don't eat the recommended fruit intake.



Evidence for health & education benefits

A Tasmanian School Lunch pilot programⁱ providing a two-course nutritious sit-down meal in three schools found:

- increased student concentration
- improved learning outcomes
- better classroom behaviour after lunch
- increased student attendance
- reduced school ground litter
- kids enjoyed sitting with friends to eat
- kids enjoyed eating vegetables in meals



90%

of parents would like cooked school lunches provided each day



89%

of parents were willing to pay \$3 per day per child for school meals.

ⁱ The Tasmanian School Lunch feasibility study funded by the Tasmanian Government Health Department at three schools during Term 4, 2020, piloted a sit down, cooked from scratch, two course school lunch over 20 days, for 201 students. The study was evaluated by the Menzies Institute of Medical Research.



Supports local growers and economies

Locally sourced fresh produce for school meals supports growers, suppliers and local communities.



Societal benefits

Supports long-term outcomes in:

- Obesity reduction
- Preventative health
- Food security for children
- Health equality for all
- Improved eating culture of Australians

Every \$1 invested in school lunch programs creates 3-10 fold economic returns

from improved health and education among schoolchildren and increased productivity when they become working adults.ⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱ World Food Program, 2016 Cost-Benefit Analysis School Feeding Investment Case.