

Developing your student health team

Introduction

A student health team is made up of students, staff, caregivers and parents who are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of students in their school. The team works together to identify and address any issues or barriers related to eating well and being active. Health teams ensure the student voice is captured so that students feel empowered to take responsibility for their school's and their community's health and wellbeing.

Health teams provide students with leadership opportunities and the chance to make a difference to their whole school community. They learn valuable lifelong skills by being part of team discussions and taking on various roles and responsibilities. Participating in a student health team can also help schools to meet the curriculum objectives for key learning areas: Food and Nutrition and Physical Activity.

The aim of these guidelines is to help each school develop and facilitate its own student health team. They form a practical resource with advice and ideas to support your student health team's mahi.

Setting up your student health team

Each student health team is organised and run by a lead staff member, who helps guide the team towards achieving its goals.

Schools may like to create a new student health team or use an existing student group, such as a student council or garden club. Try to encourage quieter students – those who are not in established groups or who are not your usual peer leaders – to apply to be in the group. It should always be an opt-in situation.

While it is great to include a representative from each age group, we advise recruiting students who are aged over 7 years old. Some schools choose to create a health team made up of only senior students, who then survey the entire school to ensure the student voice is representative of all ages.

Lead staff member's role:

- recruit the student health team
- to help set up the various roles and responsibilities within the team
- to encourage everyone to participate and job share
- to establish a meeting frequency (i.e. monthly) and to check in with the team at each meeting
- to give direction but not dictate.

Who else can be involved in your student health team?

- canteen manager
- PTA representative
- board member
- caregiver or parent
- other health providers or representatives from relevant community organisations, eg. Health Promoting Schools.



The **Heart Foundation** can offer basic professional development sessions for student health teams to get them started. These sessions cover the best ways to communicate with and engage the school community, such as using school assemblies, newsletters, class blogs and the school website.

Getting started

Once the student health team is established, they need to meet to discuss:

- the role of the health team
- a name for the team
- a meeting timetable so each member knows where and when to meet
- team roles and responsibilities, e.g. who will take meeting minutes, how minutes will be communicated, and who will talk at assembly.



Identifying key areas to work on

Next, the team needs to identify any issues which are preventing students, parents and the wider community from eating well and keeping active. This could be done via a survey (online or paper), by asking questions at parent teacher interviews, or at your school hub if you have one.

Creating an action plan

Once your health team has identified the key issues, it's time to set some goals and create a simple action plan. It may be best to focus on one action at a time. At this point it's also a good idea to get buy-in from your school community by asking for feedback on your team's findings and priorities. Give them the opportunity to feed back to the school, as well as school board and PTA. Is there something the board and PTA can do to assist in making things happen?

Ideas for student health team initiatives

Make changes to the school food service menu to improve the range of nutritious food on offer.

- Use the sample food service survey to find out what types of food students want to buy at school.
- Work with the food service operator and staff to bring about changes.

Source healthy lunch providers.

- Find out which providers in your area offer healthy lunch options, or use the Fresh Made resources to guide healthier options at your school tuckshop.

Work with local food outlets to improve the food they sell.

- Use your student health team to work with local food and drinks outlets such as takeaways, dairies and bakeries to provide and promote healthier options.

Promote healthy fundraising or healthy class party ideas to school staff.

Run events or competitions to encourage healthy lunchbox foods.

- e.g. Green Bay Primary School runs an annual Master Chef competition where each class must design its ideal healthy lunchbox and present it for judging. A panel of experts picks the winning lunchbox and its creators receive a fabulous prize.

Run events to increase physical activity within your school.

- e.g. Have a Dance-a-thon in your school including prizes and certificates. Make it a sponsored event for The Heart Foundation for more fun!