

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

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New tool to tackle childhood obesity

The Australian Government is backing a new tactic aimed at significantly reducing the obesity epidemic among young Australians by providing a free menu planning tool for early childhood education and care providers.

Currently, one in four children and almost two out of three adults within Australia are considered overweight or obese.

According to international research, good eating habits embedded in children at an early age reduces the risks of obesity later in life.

The feedAustralia program, which is currently being trialled in early childhood education and care settings by University of Newcastle, translates world's best nutritional know-how into an every day, ready-to-use menu planning tool, to support Australia's 25,000 plus providers.

Meals given to children in long day care account for up to 67 per cent of their daily nutritional requirements.

According to Professor John Wiggers, Professor School of Medicine and Public Health, University of Newcastle, it is about "giving Directors, cooks and food handlers a seamless and fail safe menu planning tool that immediately determines if each dish meets Australian Dietary Guidelines".

"We have heard from many providers that while they do their best to provide nutritious meals for their children, it is difficult to know whether each dish across their menus is meeting the guidelines," Professor Wiggers said.

"The feedAustralia program bridges the gap between the world's best nutritional expertise and the day-to-day practices of early childhood education and care providers.

"Essentially, it equips providers with an in-house dietician," he said.

Laureate Professor Nick Talley, Chair of the Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges and past President of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians said the opportunity of not only providing excellent nutritious meals to children but also instilling in them lifelong healthy eating habits is a ground-breaking interruption to the chronic obesity challenge we continue to face.

"As obesity tracks from childhood into adulthood, early childhood education and care settings provide a valuable opportunity to improve child care nutrition and prevent obesity in children and adults later in life," he said.

"Nurturing better eating habits for life from a young age is a much more effective and more durable approach to tackling obesity compared to seeking to fix eating habits at a later stage."

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New tool to tackle childhood obesity (cont.)

The **feedAustralia** early childhood nutrition program has been developed over a four-year partnership with the University of Newcastle, Hunter New England Population Health and Healthy Australia to provide early childhood education and care providers with a free program that translates expert nutritional knowledge into everyday 'best food selection'.

The program is currently being trialled in 54 centres in a study led by the University of Newcastle and Hunter New England Population Health, which has been running for the past 12 months and will shine a light on the potential for feedAustralia to be a frontline strategy in addressing childhood obesity.

The feedAustralia program has a database of over 200 recipes and 2000 ingredients with established nutrient profiles and serve recommendations. The provider's daily menu is automatically displayed to parents of children attending care via the parent portal of the program.

Cheryl Carberry, the cook from Little Beginnings at Warners Bay has been using the feedAustralia program since December 2016.

"feedAustralia has given us the assurance that the meals we are giving our children every day meet Australian standards," she said.

"The recipes are easy to prepare, make use of readily available seasonal produce, offers substitutions where required and can accommodate for food allergies and other individual dietary needs.

"The program also enables us to reduce food wastage as we now have a better understanding of quantities and portion sizes and can order more precisely the amounts required. And of course our children, and parents, love it."

The Australian government has committed \$1.08 million to roll-out the feedAustralia program. The program will be made available at no cost to early childhood education and care providers nationally in 2018 and has been built specifically to integrate with Federal child care quality regulations.

Providers can register to receive the feedAustralia program at feedaustralia.org.au

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For more information or for interview opportunities please contact: Nicolette Baxter at feedAustralia on (03) 8628 9320 or 0438 143 342 and nicolette.baxter@feedaustralia.org.au

About feedAustralia: The feedAustralia early childhood nutritional program has been developed through a 4-year partnership in conjunction with the University of Newcastle (UON), Hunter New England Population Health (HNEPH) and Healthy Australia. Hunter New England Population Health and University of Newcastle researchers include experts in epidemiology and behavioural science, health promotion practitioners, allied health clinicians, statisticians with experience in large scale obesity prevention research, in settings including early childhood education and care. The program is supported by Laureate Professor Nick Talley, Chair of the Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges and past President of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Commonwealth Department of Health, Commonwealth Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, The National Heart Foundation, The Gut Foundation and CSIRO, as well as a multidisciplinary team of leading academics.