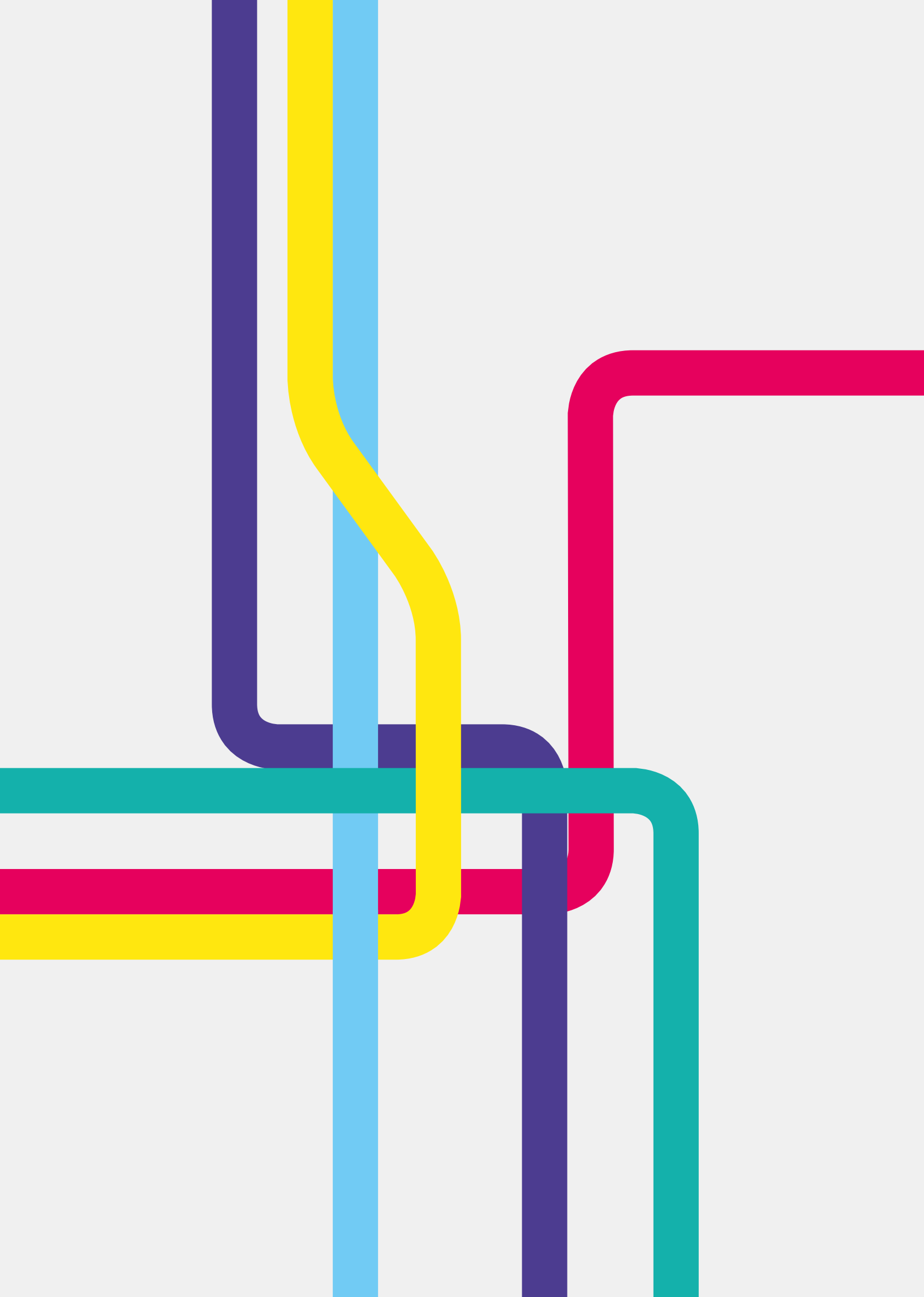




**VicHealth
Healthy Eating
Strategy**

2017-19





**This strategy will
enable VicHealth
to deliver its
organisational
objective of**

PROMOTING

HEALTH EATING

Introduction

The *VicHealth Action Agenda for Health Promotion* provides the strategic direction of the organisation for 10 years, from 2013 to 2023. The Healthy Eating strategic imperative has a 10-year goal to 'encourage 200,000 more Victorians to adopt a healthier diet' and a 3-year priority of 'more people choosing water and healthy food options'.

This *VicHealth Healthy Eating Strategy 2017–2019* (the strategy) outlines VicHealth's approach to the achievement of our 3-year priority and 10-year goal by:

- outlining the strategic approach for implementation
- identifying key focus areas and specific targets
- proposing the appropriate actions to be taken
- establishing regular evaluation and monitoring systems to measure progress towards specific targets.

The strategy will inform our research, collaboration and investment over the period 2017–2019 and provide an overview of major current and planned activities.

2017–19 PRIORITIES

VICHEALTH WILL:

- work in partnership to gain consensus and commitment for salt reduction action from governments, the public and industry in Victoria
- create environments that support more Victorians choosing water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs)
- support research and innovation to improve fruit and vegetable access and supply
- support policies that make healthier food and drink choices the easier choices, including clear food labelling, food reformulation, and a reduction in junk food marketing and promotion to children.



10
YEAR

GOAL

200,000 more Victorians adopt a healthier diet

3
YEAR

PRIORITY

More people choosing water and healthy food options

VicHealth's role

VicHealth is a pioneer in health promotion.

We work with partners to discover, implement and share solutions to the health problems facing Victorians. We seek a Victoria where everyone enjoys better health and wellbeing.

VicHealth has a distinguished history in promoting healthy food that is available, accessible and affordable. We believe that food must be nutritious, culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable for all Victorians.

VicHealth has a unique role in promoting health through partnerships, promotion and leading innovative healthy eating initiatives in Victoria. Enabling more Victorians to enjoy healthy diets will result in substantial health and economic gains across communities.

Why healthy eating?

The value of healthy diets

Eating a healthy diet provides benefits across all life stages. A healthy diet is needed for growth and development in infants, children and young people. It supports productivity in adulthood and is essential to healthy ageing (DHHS 2016).

Healthy diets are a protective health factor, while eating an unhealthy diet increases the risk of obesity, cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, some cancers and dental caries (DHHS 2016). In 2016, dietary factors were a key driver of death and disability in Australia, carrying a greater risk than tobacco (IHME 2017).

Improvements in diets can have a positive impact on health in the short and long term. For example, reducing sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) consumption can improve dental health and reduce risk of weight gain. Limiting intake of foods with added salt reduces blood pressure, and for those with hypertension may result in a reduction in stroke and heart disease. Diets rich in fibre and nutrients have been linked to improved mental health and lower risk of nutritional deficiencies (NHMRC 2013).

Obesity, diet and the burden of disease

Excessive consumption of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods is fuelling the growing burden of obesity in the Australian population (Ng et al. 2014, WHO 2003). In line with this trend, almost two in three Australian adults are overweight or obese, and one in four Australian children aged 2–17 years are overweight or obese (ABS 2013).

The excessive consumption of unhealthy foods is likely due to a combination of food system factors, such as the increased availability and ease of access to unhealthy foods; environmental factors such as low income and time pressures; and individual behaviour (VicHealth 2017).

Obesity is associated with serious health problems, including chronic disease, poor mental health, poor oral health and decreased overall wellbeing (Australian Government Department of Health 2009). In 2016, high Body Mass Index was ranked second out of the risk factors driving death and disability in Australia (IHME 2016).

In Victoria alone, the economic cost of obesity was estimated to be \$14.4 billion, totalling costs to the health system, productivity, caring and the cost of lost wellbeing (Access Economics 2008).

Inequalities in diet and obesity

Across Australia, adults living in regional and remote areas are more likely to be overweight or obese compared to adults living in major cities (VicHealth 2017). Indigenous Australians experience a greater impact from diet-related illness than other Australians (VicHealth 2015a).

Conversely, people in higher income groups, non-Indigenous Australians and people living in more advantaged neighbourhoods are most likely to eat healthy, balanced diets, to have healthy weight and better health outcomes (VicHealth 2015a).

The Australian Dietary Guidelines

The *Australian Dietary Guidelines* provide recommendations for eating a healthy diet for health benefits and address the dietary risks that contribute to obesity and related disease (NHMRC 2013). The guidelines group together foods that share similar nutrients to create five core food groups: grains and cereals, vegetables, fruit, dairy and meat. Within each core food group, the guidelines recommend a minimum number of daily serves.

The guidelines discourage the intake of 'discretionary foods', which are foods and drinks that are high in fat, added sugar, salt and/or alcohol. Discretionary foods are not necessary in a healthy diet, and should only be consumed occasionally in small amounts.

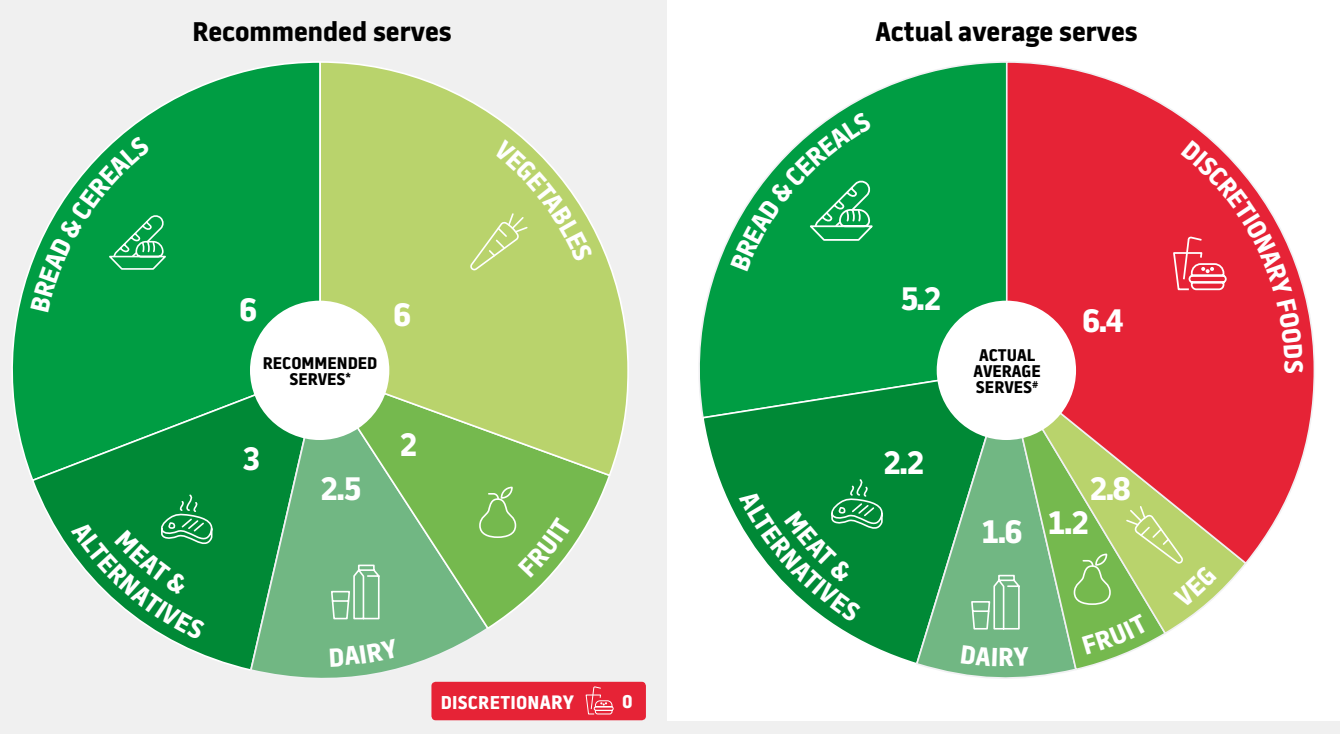
What are Australians eating?

The charts on the next page show how Australians are not meeting the minimum requirements for any of the five core food groups, and conversely consuming a large proportion of discretionary foods.

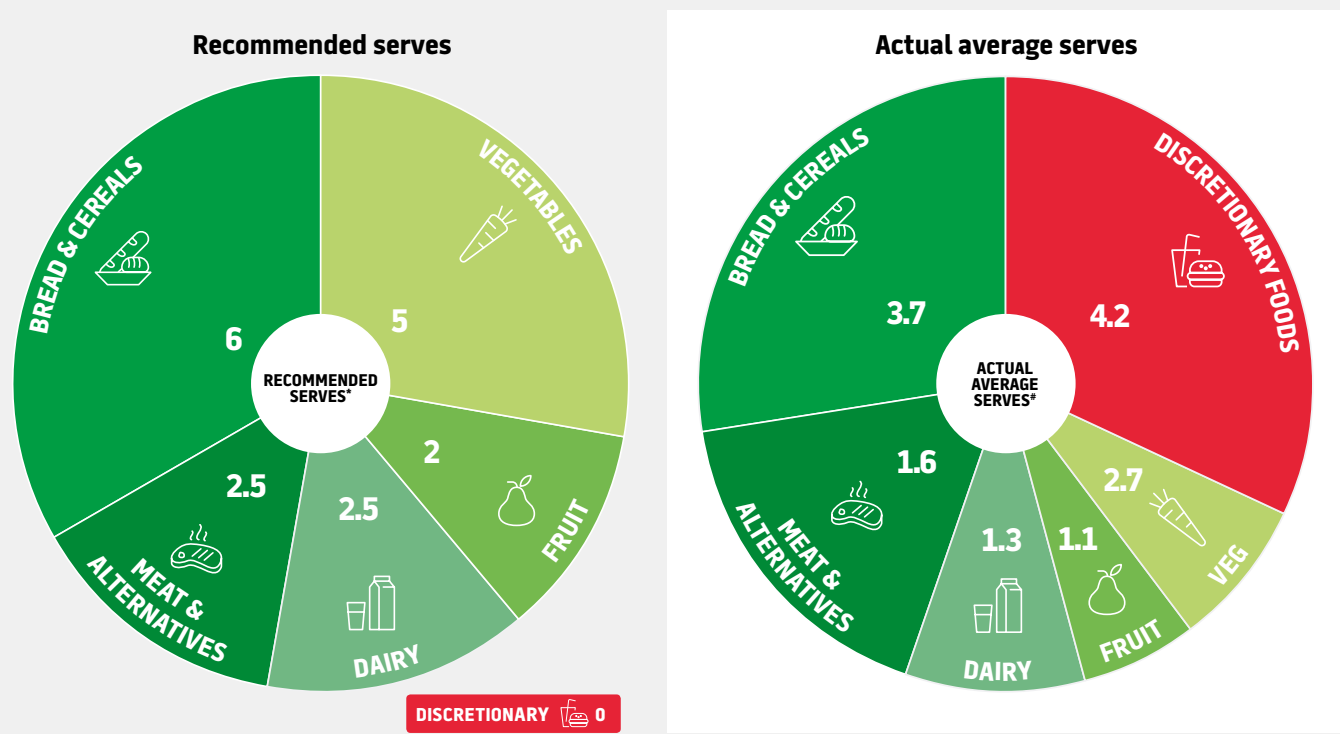
SERVES OF FOOD GROUPS

RECOMMENDED VS ACTUAL

AUSTRALIAN MALES AGED 19–50 YEARS



AUSTRALIAN FEMALES AGED 19–50 YEARS



* Based on Australian Health Survey (ABS 2014)

Changing healthy eating behaviour

Eating behaviours are shaped by a complex interplay of individual and environmental factors. At an individual level, a person's preferences, cultural beliefs, knowledge, skills and perceived barriers influence their ability to express healthy eating behaviours. In addition, the increase in the available food supply over time is considered to be a key driver of increasing obesity rates (Vandevijvere et al. 2015). Alongside this, energy-dense foods and high-energy drinks (e.g. sugar-sweetened beverages) are heavily marketed and readily available in large portions, helping contribute to 'passive overconsumption' (Swinburn et al. 2004).

In Australia, the attitude towards regular consumption of discretionary food and drinks is a perceived social norm (DHHS 2016). The Australian Health Survey (ABS 2013) found that in 2011–2012 over a third of daily energy consumed (from infants to elderly) was made up of discretionary foods. In addition, over half of the food budget of Australian households was spent on discretionary food and drinks (ABS 2013).

In this strategy, VicHealth focuses on four key healthy eating challenges:

- **High salt intake**

Sodium in salt is linked to 1 in 20 deaths in Victoria, risks of high blood pressure and heart failure, stomach cancer and osteoporosis (VicHealth 2015b). However, in Victoria, both adults and children consume almost twice the maximum daily amount of sodium that is recommended for good health (Grimes et al. 2013, Jeffery et al. 2012). Around 75% of salt in our diet comes from processed food, and salt reduction is recognised as one of the most cost-effective and equitable ways to improve population health (Cobiac et al. 2010).

- **Consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs)**

SSBs are the largest source of added sugars in the Australian diet and can lead to tooth decay and being overweight or obese, which increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers (ABS 2014). Reducing SSB consumption and increasing water consumption has the potential to improve health and wellbeing by reducing kilojoule intake and the risks of weight gain and dental caries (WHO 2015).

- **Inadequate fruit and vegetable intake**

Fruit and vegetables contain vital dietary fibre, vitamins and minerals, and can protect against heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. However, the Australian Health Survey (ABS 2014) found that less than 4% of adults and 1% of children usually consume the minimum recommended serves of vegetables; and less than a third of those over two years meet the recommendations for fruit. It has been proposed that the cost of nutrient-rich foods, such as fruit and vegetables, relative to nutrient-poor foods may be a key driver of the link between poverty and obesity (Drewnowski and Specter 2004). Other factors such as poor availability, difficulty accessing healthy food choices and low personal food skills and knowledge can increase the perceived costs of fruit and vegetables (Williams et al. 2012). In Melbourne, those in the lowest income bracket were almost six times more likely to report restricted access to food due to difficulty carrying groceries, and households in more disadvantaged areas were less likely to have access to a car for food shopping (Burns et al. 2011). Collaboration across a range of sectors and stakeholders is required to make healthy foods physically, socially, culturally and financially the easier, more desirable choices relative to less healthy foods (VicHealth 2016).

- **The need to support healthy food choices through environmental and policy change**

It is recognised that strategic policy actions and efforts from governments, the food industry and society will be required to improve diets and halt the obesity epidemic (VicHealth 2017). This approach is echoed in the NOURISHING framework developed by the World Cancer Fund International (World Cancer Research Fund International 2016). The NOURISHING framework highlights the importance of changing the food environment, including nutrition labelling standards; healthy food standards in public institutions; and economic approaches, such as food taxes or subsidies, restrictions on food advertising, and reformulation initiatives to improve the quality of food (VicHealth 2017).

The policy environment

VicHealth's work to promote healthy eating is strategically positioned to align with international, national and state priorities within the food policy environment.

International policy environment

Healthy eating is a key underpinning of the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*, to which Australia is a signatory. The World Health Organization (WHO) has set guidelines for both sugar and sodium (salt), issuing the *WHO Sugars Intake for Adults and Children* (WHO 2015) and identifying sodium reduction as one of nine global targets to prevent and control non-communicable diseases (WHO 2013).

National policy environment

Eat for Health – Australian Dietary Guidelines (NHMRC 2013) outlines the types and amounts of food, food groups and dietary patterns needed for good health and this was also the benchmark for the Australian Health Survey (ABS 2014).

Victorian policy environment

In Victoria, the key healthy eating policies include:

- *Healthy Choices: food and drink classification guide* (DHHS 2017) are setting-specific policy guidelines to support implementation in hospitals and health services, workplaces, sports and recreation centres and parks.
- The *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015–2019* (DHHS 2015), which acknowledges healthy eating as one of the six key priority health promotion areas and outlines the importance of promoting the consumption of healthy, sustainable and safe food and supporting healthy food choices.
- *Victorian School Canteens and Other School Food Services Policy* (DEECD 2012), which provides advice to schools on developing healthy school food services and policies that support students in making healthy food and drink choices.

VicHealth's Operational Model

The VicHealth operational model is built around three interconnecting pillars (Innovate–Inform–Integrate), delivered through five organisational approaches.

INNOVATE

Accelerate outcomes for health promotion

INFORM

Engage with individuals and organisations

INTEGRATE

Help Victoria to lead health promotion policy and practice.



Healthy eating strategic approach 2016–19

Our approach will be to work collaboratively with both state and national agencies to promote healthy eating messages and activities supported by scientific evidence and established best practice.

Eating a healthy diet that is consistent with the Australian Dietary Guidelines (NHMRC 2013) is vital for the health of Victorians. VicHealth aims to increase the consumption of a wide variety of nutritious foods, decrease the intake of discretionary foods and make healthier food choices easier.

VicHealth is committed to collaborative partnerships, policy and research to achieve our healthy eating goals. We advocate for both population-level and targeted interventions to increase the availability, accessibility and affordability of healthy foods and drinks for all Victorians.

Key focus areas

The core investments and activities to be undertaken for the duration of this strategy are identified in Focus areas 1 and 2; and are complemented by partnership, policy and research action across Focus areas 3 and 4, supporting the development of healthier food environments and system-level change.

Focus area 1: Reducing salt consumption

Focus area 2: Promoting water as the drink of choice instead of SSBs

Focus area 3: Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption

Focus area 4: Food environment policy change.

Until 2019, we will focus our major programmatic and campaign activity on reducing salt consumption and promoting water as the drink of choice. As part of our long-term commitment to healthy eating and policy environment, we will also support research and collaborative partnership activity to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, and food environment policy change.

3
YEAR

PRIORITY

More people choosing water and healthy food options

3-YEAR PRIORITY

FOCUS AREA 1

Reducing salt consumption

Working in partnership to gain consensus and commitment for salt reduction action from governments, the public and industry in Victoria.

INNOVATE—INFORM

VicHealth is committed to implementing salt reduction strategies through collaborative partnerships that align with a *30 per cent relative reduction* in dietary salt intake across the Victorian population by 2025, as endorsed by the Australian Government and the World Health Organization's Global action plan for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (WHO 2013).

VicHealth is the lead agency for the Victorian Salt Reduction Strategic Partnership to advance action on salt reduction, develop strategic partnerships, generate public debate and increase public awareness to improve attitudes and change behaviours related to salt consumption.

From 2017 to 2019, we will act to:

- Increase state-level and national action through the Victorian Salt Reduction Strategic Partnership, Australian Health Policy Collaboration and related policy development activity.
- Raise public awareness of the negative health impacts of high salt intake.
- Increase public demand for lower salt foods, including through greater government and food industry action.
- Support the Victorian food industry and others to adopt innovative practices in reducing salt.
- Build the evidence base for salt reduction in Victoria.

FOCUS AREA 2

Promoting water as the drink of choice instead of SSBs

Creating environments that support more Victorians choosing water instead of SSBs.

INNOVATE—INTEGRATE

VicHealth supports the Australian Dietary Guidelines (NHMRC 2013) and the implementation of the Victorian government's Healthy Choices: food and drinks policy (DHHS 2017). In particular, VicHealth is committed to promoting water as the drink of choice rather than sugar-sweetened beverages, such as soft drinks, energy drinks, fruit drinks, sports drinks, ready-to-drink iced teas, flavoured waters and cordial.

Our water initiative comprises both supply and demand activities to increase access to and promotion of drinking water, particularly in public areas and sporting facilities.

From 2017 to 2019, we will act to:

- Increase access to and availability of free drinking water in specific settings, including sporting clubs, sport and recreation facilities and major stadiums.
- Increase the consumption of drinking water in key settings by expanding the delivery of behavioural insights and other innovative approaches.
- Build the evidence and business case for improved supply and demand for water instead of SSBs in sport-related and other public settings.
- Strengthen evidence-based policy and practice to increase the consumption of drinking water, including in sport-related settings.
- Increase the knowledge and capability of organisations to deliver evidence-based approaches to support water consumption, with a focus on sport and local government settings.

3-YEAR PRIORITY

FOCUS AREA 3

Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption

Supporting research and innovation to improve fruit and vegetable access and supply.

INNOVATE

VicHealth has a strong legacy in supporting initiatives that improve access to fruit and vegetables. Investment since the Seed Challenge program in 2013–2015 has focused on collaborating with partners to support research and innovation in fruit and vegetable access and supply, building on the success of Seed Challenge programs and related activities.

From 2017 to 2019, we will:

- Explore new environments and innovative areas that can influence fruit and vegetable intake, predominantly through the VicHealth Innovation Research grants.
- Build the evidence base for how to create change that leads to increased fruit and vegetable consumption, e.g. within the supermarket and retail environments.
- Advocate for evidence-based, innovative approaches that increase fruit and vegetable consumption and promote a sustainable food supply, e.g. through strategic communication about new data and research outcomes.

FOCUS AREA 4

Food environment policy change

Supporting policies that make healthier food and drink choices the easier choices, including clear food labelling, food reformulation, and a reduction in junk food marketing and promotion to children.

INFORM

VicHealth works with researchers, public health and nutrition experts, policy makers, food industry and the wider community to develop the evidence and business case for healthier food environments. We are committed to further development and communication of evidence-based policy and regulatory initiatives that could make healthier food and drink choices easier in Victoria. Because many of our dietary habits are established early in life, we are particularly concerned with stronger action to address discretionary food marketing and promotion to children.

From 2017 to 2019, we will act to:

- Support evidence-based policy and regulatory initiatives promoting healthy eating and reducing SSB consumption, overweight and obesity.
- Undertake research-based projects that explore the opportunities for reducing junk food sponsorship, marketing and promotion to children with a focus on sport settings.
- Support clear food labelling to enable people to choose healthier foods consistent with the Australian Dietary Guidelines.
- Support a nutritious food supply, including through product reformulation to reduce added salt, sugars and fats.

10
YEAR

GOAL

200,000 more
Victorians adopt
a healthier diet

Monitoring our progress

VicHealth is committed to ensuring our performance is thoroughly monitored and evaluated.

Outcome measures across the key investments to deliver on the strategy will be captured in VicHealth's Action Agenda Scorecard. The Scorecard is the system used to track progress towards achieving our target of 200,000 more Victorians adopting a healthier diet. VicHealth's Action Agenda Scorecard is measured using a range of indicators that focus on both individual and environmental changes, and which can influence the behaviour of people who interact in those environments.

VicHealth's 10-year goal for 200,000 more Victorians to adopt a healthier diet is assessed at a population level using the proportion of Victorians achieving the recommended number of fruit and vegetable serves (as recommended by the Australian Dietary Guidelines) as a proxy measure for overall healthiness of diet. The data source for this measure is the Victorian Population Health Survey.

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