

Strategy 2.3: Foster research environments that promote the use of research evidence

Research informing policy for a healthier food environment

The consumption of unhealthy food and drinks is a major contributor to obesity in both children and adults. The resulting non-communicable diseases, including heart disease, diabetes and stroke, are the biggest killers. With one in two adults, and more than one in five children overweight or obese in NSW, The George Institute for Global Health and NSW Health have partnered on a range of evidence-based initiatives to improve the food environment and prevent obesity. This work is a demonstration of *Population Health Research Strategy 2.3 (Fostering research environments that promote the use of research evidence)*.

Examples of collaboration between The George Institute and the NSW Ministry of Health include conducting research that assessed the alignment of the Health Star Rating system with the Australian Dietary Guidelines. This research directly informed the development of the revised [NSW Healthy School Canteen Strategy](#) and the [Healthy Food and Drink in NSW Health Facilities for Staff and Visitors Framework](#). The George Institute has also worked with NSW Health on developing legislation around menu labelling and assisted in plans for evaluation and ongoing surveillance of this initiative.

The research to inform these initiatives included the systematic collection and analysis of food composition data. Research methods included the analysis of quantitative and qualitative research, including stakeholder consultation with government, industry and consumers.

The George Institute's findings demonstrated that the Health Star Rating system could be used to support classification of food for hospitals and schools. The research identified important opportunities for improving the food environment throughout NSW, and in the food provision guidelines that inform major institutions, including the Australian Catholic University and UNSW Sydney.

Thanks to this partnership, findings from the research have been integrated successfully into flagship programs launched throughout NSW, such as the state-wide initiative to remove sugary drinks from vending machines in health facilities.

Further reading

Dunford E, Cobcroft M, Thomas M, Wu JH. Technical Report: Alignment of NSW Healthy Food Provision Policy with the Health Star Rating System. (2015). Sydney, NSW: NSW Ministry of Health. Available at: www.health.nsw.gov.au/health/Publications/health-star-rating-system.pdf

NSW Ministry of Health. Healthy Food and Drink in NSW Health Facilities for Staff and Visitors Framework. NSW Ministry of Health: North Sydney, NSW, Australia, 2017. Available at: www.health.nsw.gov.au/health/Publications/hfd-framework.pdf

Tsai C, Slater S, Ronto R, Gebel K, Wu JH. Removal of sugary drinks from vending machines: an Australian university case study. *Aust N Z J Public Health* 2018; 42(6): 588.

Tsai C, Svensen E, Flood V, Probst Y, Reilly K, Corbett S, Wu J. Healthiness of food and beverages for sale at two public hospitals in New South Wales, Australia. *Nutrients* 2018; 10(2): 216.