Healthy Food and Drink Project
Needs Assessment – summary

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Background

The Western Australian School Canteen Association Inc. (WASCA) has been supporting school canteens to operate viable healthy food services since 1994. WASCA has been contracted since 2006 to provide a range of services to WA schools to support schools to implement the Department of Education's *Healthy Food and Drink* (HFD) policy.

The HFD policy applies to all areas of the school where the Principal is responsible for the supply of food and drinks. For example, the canteen/food service (canteen), classroom rewards, excursions and camps, classroom cooking activities and school based fundraising. Principals are encouraged to promote consistent messages about healthy lifestyles in all school activities.

The HFD policy is based on the:

- Australian Dietary Guidelines; Australian Guide to Healthy Eating
- Health Promoting Schools Framework
- FOCiS nutrient criteria
- Traffic light system of categorising items as green, amber or red.

Ongoing activities in the Healthy Food and Drink project, currently funded by the Department of Health (DoH), include an advisory service, training, capacity building activities, one-on-one consultancy service, and menu, product and recipe assessments.

The purpose of this report is to summarise an additional activity conducted in the first year of the project (June 2015-July 2016) - a needs assessment to investigate the application, acceptability and use of online tools and other strategies to support schools in implementing the *Healthy Food and Drink* (HFD) Policy.

Methodology

- Environmental scan
  - literature review – search terms included healthy food and drink policy, school canteens; online tools and learning; use and accessibility of computers; internet access; and online health programs as a method of improving health
  - establish a library database of existing online tools and resources that are readily available in Australia to support school canteens
  - including canteen associations and networks websites and other organisations that support/work with school canteens (n=26)
- Online survey of WASCA members using Survey Monkey (n=69). Data collected included:
  - demographic details
  - computer/printer/internet access
  - preferences for contacting the canteen
  - resources awareness and usefulness
  - online tools knowledge and preferences
- Focus groups with canteen managers and parent body representatives (n=21) from primary and high schools in Perth metro area. The focus of these sessions were:
  - Food label literacy
  - Traffic light colour coding activity
  - Review existing online tools
  - Review existing online videos focussing on cooking skills, school showcases and recipe demonstrations
  - Review online menu templates.

Results

- Access to devices and/or internet to use online tools and resources varies greatly and represents a significant barrier
- 60% of respondents have access to a computer; 1 in 5 indicated there are restrictions on their internet access
- 83% of respondents have accessed the WASCA website; and 44% follow WASCA on Facebook
- Email is the preferred communication method (70%)
- Self-reported confidence in using online tools and resources is high
- 95% reported they are very likely or likely to use WASCA online tools and resources e.g. menu and product assessment tools
- Participants identified the following aspects of using an online product assessment tool:

  Positive

    - Fast/quick
    - Immediate response
    - Can be done in your own time
    - Not discretionary (if people do not use their own discretion)

  Negative

    - Limited computer access
    - Limited time
    - Level of accuracy (if people use their own discretion)

Recommendations

There were five recommendations:

1) *Develop eCanteens section of the WASCA website*
   Rationale:
   - Survey respondents and focus group participants expressed a desire for greater online tools and resources
   - A dedicated section of the WASCA website makes navigation easy
   - No external cost involved in development
   Strategies:
   - Ensure adequate staffing levels are maintained to regularly update the WASCA website
   - WASCA will advertise via other mediums that this section of the website exists to multiple stakeholders in schools where access is not a barrier e.g. parent bodies, Principals and teachers. In addition, where possible hardcopy resources may be sent via post or electronic copies via email.

2) *Develop online menu template/s*
   Rationale:
   - High endorsement from target group
   Strategies:
   - Develop the tool in a number of formats using different software programs e.g. Microsoft Word, Excel, Publisher
   - Advertise tools via a variety of communication methods e.g. hardcopy newsletter, Facebook page.

Results continued

3) *Develop tools/resources to assist schools to effectively operate a canteen that in turn support HFD policy implementation*
   Examples include: label reading tool, pre-formatted Microsoft Excel spread sheets for record keeping, job descriptions, strategies for linking the canteen to the curriculum, strategies to increase whole school approach to healthy eating. In addition, while menu assessment is incorporated into traffic light training (face to face and online) a simple step-by-step factsheet could be available for download from the website
   Rationale:
   - Identified need to up skill canteen staff, Principals, parent body representatives and teachers; inexpensive to develop
   Strategies:
   - Link to existing tools/resources
   - Ensure adequate staffing levels are maintained to complete this activity
   - Promote tools at WASCA training and events; as well as through WASCA partners e.g. WACSSO, WA Health Promoting Schools Association Inc.
   - As not all canteens have access to a computer in the canteen and/or internet access some hard copies may be required.

4) *Develop/promote online videos*
   Rationale:
   - High endorsement from target group
   - Large number of existing videos
   - Moving with the current climate and a high usage of online tools
   Strategies:
   - Develop set criteria to review existing videos in a timely and consistent manner
   - Create WASCA YouTube channel and only include high quality videos that meet set criteria
   - Investigate partnership opportunities with other groups who already have the facilities/equipment and skills to develop videos e.g. university media students; WACSSO
   - Investigate funding sources to develop WASCA videos.

5) *Investigate the development of an online product assessment tool*
   Rationale:
   - High endorsement from target group
   - Decrease demand for WASCA services
   Identified barriers:
   - Outside the scope of the current contract
   - Potential for canteens to adopt a 'close enough is good enough' mentality and therefore the influx of Red items into canteens is a possibility
   - We do not want to add to the 'digital divide' (The digital divide is commonly used to describe differences in access, skills, knowledge and ability to use information primarily through the internet) where by those without the skills and access required to use the tool become further isolated and unsupported
   Strategies:
   - Develop position statements for the use or non-use of existing tools
   - Investigate funding sources to develop a tool and provide training
   - Investigate partnership opportunities with other groups to develop and promote the tool.

In addition to the needs assessment further consultation with the target groups will take place in 2016 via an independent impact evaluation study being conducted with Curtin University.

The needs assessment recommendations, up to date usage of online tools on the WASCA website based on Google Analytics as well as the evaluation survey results will inform the update of existing tools and resources as well as any additional resources required to support canteen staff, Principals, teachers and parents to implement the HFD policy.

Conclusion

The needs assessment was invaluable and will be used to inform the development of a suite of online tools and resources. The comprehensive approach has indicated the target audience utilise the WASCA website and expressed confidence in their ability to use information technology. Evidence suggests a preference for a combination of online resources and contacting WASCA by phone for advice and support.

Future consideration needs to be given to the 40% of canteens that do not have a computer in the canteen; and varying degrees of computer literacy. Further development of online tools and recourses must ensure that they do not create a barrier to accessing important information and/or lead to greater isolation.

Based on the findings, five recommendations have been compiled. While a number of resources are already available to school canteens, a greater online platform of tools and resources are likely to support implementation of the HFD policy in WA.