



A call to update the National Get Up & Grow guidelines and associated resources

What is the problem?

It is time to update or replace the Get Up & Grow guidelines and associated resources to ensure a national support tool that is current, useable, driven by user needs, and is reflective of lived experiences and contexts.

What is the background to the problem?

The Get Up & Grow guidelines and resources were developed in 2009¹ and partially updated in 2013² to align with the Australian Dietary Guidelines released in the same year. There is a review underway to update the Australian Dietary Guidelines, with completion scheduled for 2024.³

Since 2009, our understanding of the interaction between nutrition and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings has also evolved and this emerging evidence, knowledge and understanding is not incorporated in the current guideline and resources.

Over 900,000 children up to school-age attend ECEC services, meaning that these children could be accessing up to two-thirds of their daily dietary intake whilst at an ECEC service.⁴

Whilst there are a range of diverse resources available to support ECEC services and families the distribution of support is not equal or equitable across Australia⁵ and thus National Guidelines and Resources are needed.

What is the opportunity? Why a national resource?

EQUALITY— **To provide equality of support services**

Access to state government funded programs by ECEC providers and the children and families that access their services differs greatly across the country with only three jurisdictions currently providing government funded state wide programs and services.^{5,6} Indeed these jurisdictions have support services including on-going personnel which

can tailor support to meet services needs across their jurisdictions.

Whilst national guidelines and resources are insufficient on their own to meet the needs of those jurisdictions without government funded support programs, at a minimum, an up to date national guidelines and associated resource can provide a basic guiding document which represents the diversity of needs across all jurisdictions in the country.

At the moment for some jurisdictions there is a lack of both a state funded initiative and a national resource that reflects the needs of all services within a jurisdiction. The NNN calls for both in all jurisdictions.

EQUITY—To support equity of services

Whilst equality of access to support services and resources is important to ensure opportunity for all, it is insufficient to overcome all the inequalities faced by those children, parents, carers, communities, and ECEC services with most need.

There is much more that can and should be done to improve the reach, relevance and consequently effectiveness and efficiency of such support resources to target and help those most in need.^{5,6} Indeed this also aligns with current agreements such as the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education which has a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, vulnerable children, and children experiencing disadvantage.⁸

EFFICIENCY AND CONSISTENCY—To ensure current best practice is available to all

There is a need to ensure priority areas such as food safety, early years feeding and allergies are up to date and based on changing and current best practice. Indeed broader areas that make up a healthy food environment have also gained increased understanding and recognition since the last review of the guidelines and resources. A National resource provides the most efficient pathway for expertise to make its way into and across jurisdictional support resources, services and tools, rather than each jurisdiction needing to replicate the collation and review of the same evidence.

ALIGNMENT—To reflect current governance structures in ECEC

Get Up & Grow was initially developed under different ECEC sector governance structures. ECEC sector governance now operates on the basis of a nationally agreed approach on both the implementation of the National Quality Agenda⁹ and the regulation and quality assessment of services.¹⁰ There is an opportunity to re-align Get Up & Grow with a broader national purpose, consistent with these new governance structures, in the development of new national nutrition guides and resources.

WHY NOW?

The opportunity to be current

Increase in breadth and depth of evidence

Since the Get Up & Grow Guidelines and resources were developed and reviewed there has been an increase in the breadth and depth of evidence specific to ECEC services and healthy environments.

Reflective of current principles

Broaden the scope from nutrition as a preventative measure of obesity, to nutrition for health and sustainable food environments which better reflects emerging directions in the nutrition space.

The ability to include emerging topics

Following on from the opportunity to be current is the chance to draw on emerging topic issues in both evidence and practice that reflect the connection between nutrition and neurodevelopment¹¹ and sustainable food environments.^{12,13}

The opportunity to be timely

There is an opportunity to make the most of the timing of the current Australian Dietary Guidelines update to be completed in 2024 as well as the Early Years Learning Framework, due for completion in 2022.¹⁴

Recommendations

WHAT A NATIONAL RESOURCE SHOULD LOOK LIKE?

★ 1. DRIVEN BY USERS' NEEDS

A national guidelines and resource should be jointly developed by ECEC and public health specialists. It should be designed based on the needs of all intended users and reflect the diversity of their contexts and lived experiences. This then leads to the opportunity to recognize and raise the importance of the role of ECEC in family food settings.

★ 2. REFLECTIVE OF USERS' AND BENEFICIARIES' CONTEXTS

Select NNN policy briefs^{5,6} provide a starting point from which to begin to understand the diversity of ECEC service contexts as well as the contexts and lived experiences of the families and children who use ECEC services. A national guidelines or resource should be differentiated which ensures it reflects the diversity and variety of ECEC contexts and lived experiences. This will ensure that guidelines and resources developed have relevance to the whole system and therefore reach.

★ 3. INCLUDES ALL RELEVANT TOPICS AND THEMES

A national guidelines and resource should ensure all relevant topics and themes and associated questions relevant to ECEC services and the families they work with are included. This is to ensure all available evidence is identified, sourced and utilized. This process also highlights important gaps in understanding and ensures that any further or future research is driven directly by stakeholders and beneficiaries needs.

★ 4. IS USEABLE

A national guidelines and resource should focus on how knowledge and information is utilised and implemented as well as ensure practice and place-based experiences are included to provide meaningful learning between ECEC services. In addition there is an opportunity to engage with the ECEC sector to develop innovative sharing tools, which ensures optimal engagement with the guidelines and resources that are developed.

References

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The National Nutrition Network—ECEC

The National Nutrition Network—ECEC is made up of individuals working in research, policy and practice across Australia and internationally and with a public health and ECEC focus, specifically in the areas of nutrition and public health and with most major programs, initiatives and organisations represented in its membership.

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