



**The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation respectfully requests the Australian Government to prioritise investing in pleasurable food education via the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program.**

The program:

- is an evidence-based health and education intervention with a track record of success in improving food habits, increasing fruit and vegetable demand and consumption, and engaging children and families in healthy food behaviour
- contributes to preventing the childhood obesity pandemic and the ensuing cost of burden of disease (estimated at \$US23.7 billion annually – 1.7% of Australia’s GDP<sup>1</sup>)
- has been adapted over 20 years to a low-cost, standard national model that is scalable, flexible and adaptable to any community
- has models for early childhood, primary and secondary years that are integrated with the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum
- responds to government recommendations, global research and academic evaluations
- encourages participation from local government, business and volunteers
- engages disengaged students and connects parents with education
- is culturally inclusive, celebrating migrant and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- addresses issues experienced by the most at-risk, low-socioeconomic communities
- supports mental health, increases green spaces for children and provides opportunities for non-competitive physical activity
- enhances environmental sustainability understanding and practices
- contributes to local food security and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals
- provides learning and work pathways into agriculture, horticulture, hospitality and STEM
- builds life skills, resilience, social capital and community mindedness.

We are committed to contributing to Covid recovery through focusing on children’s health and wellbeing, engagement with school and community connection. We can also assist with building the health workforce through training in food education, and create jobs through garden and kitchen infrastructure building.

We applaud the Australian Government’s investment in preventative health. The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation is fully supportive of the National Preventive Health Strategy<sup>2</sup>, National Obesity Prevention Strategy<sup>3</sup> and the Good Practice Guide Supporting Healthy Eating and Drinking at School<sup>4</sup>. We stand ready, willing and able to operationalise these strategies, given adequate resourcing.

We invite all levels of government to view food education as imperative in growing well-rounded Australian citizens, of equal importance to sport, the arts, other areas of the curriculum and wellbeing interventions.

Our 20 years of experience collaborating with educators and families tells us that:

- educators need more professional learning, more educational material, a fully-functioning online community of practice, help with engaging their communities and greater one-on-one facilitation
- there is great demand for our services that we are under-resourced to meet
- children, families and teachers *love* the kitchen garden program and are invested in its success.

The validity of our approach is recognised by government initiatives such as Healthy Kids Advisors<sup>5</sup>, which is supported by the Australian Government. Global research demonstrates the effectiveness of school garden and cooking programs. We are frequently approached by overseas organisations to learn from us; enhanced capacity will result in global recognition of this world-leading Australian food education model.

We are currently working with approximately 1500 schools and early childhood services across Australia. There are approximately 7000 more primary schools, 2000 more secondary schools and 10,000 more early childhood services we could reach to improve life prospects for Australian children.

We invite Treasury and other government representatives to discuss this opportunity. Supporting appendices are attached.

<sup>1</sup> The Economic Impact of Overweight & Obesity in 8 Countries, World Obesity Federation 2021 <<http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/wof-files/Economic-impact-overweight-obesity-in-countries-final.pdf>>

<sup>2</sup> National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030 <<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-preventive-health-strategy-2021-2030>>

<sup>3</sup> Draft National Obesity Prevention Strategy <<https://consultations.health.gov.au/population-health-and-sport-division/draft-national-obesity-prevention-strategy/>>

<sup>4</sup> Good Practice Guide

<<http://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Portals/0/Reports/Good%20Practices%20to%20Support%20Healthy%20Eating%20and%20Drinking%20at%20School%20Updated%20Dec%202020.pdf>>

<sup>5</sup> Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures, Victorian Government 2021

<<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/health-strategies/healthy-kids-healthy-futures>>