



National Quality Standard and Victoria's Healthy Children initiatives

Background

Early childhood education and care services can access support to create healthy environments and promote children's health and wellbeing from two Healthy Together Victoria initiatives which have been developed in partnership by the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Healthy Together Victoria incorporates statewide and locally-led strategies to improve people's health where they live, learn, work and play. This includes a particular focus on children's education and care settings. The Achievement Program and Healthy Eating Advisory Service can support you to work towards the Children's health and safety quality area of the National Quality Standard.

Achievement Program

The Achievement Program assists education and care services to implement a whole of service approach to health and wellbeing. This includes creating a healthier physical and social environment, developing healthy policies, and providing children and staff with health and wellbeing learning opportunities. It encourages children, families and staff to be actively involved in health and wellbeing approaches, and has a focus on strengthening community partnerships.

Education and care services can access support to work towards benchmarks that will foster improvement across eight health priority areas:

- Healthy Eating and Oral Health
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Sun Protection
- Tobacco Control
- Active Play/Physical Activity
- Safe Environments
- Sexual Health and Wellbeing
- Alcohol and Other Drug Use

Services select priorities relevant to their needs and work towards benchmarks which are age-appropriate and focused on creating a positive physical and social environment. Services will receive step-by-step guidelines, resources and assistance to link with local health and community services that can help to strengthen health and wellbeing efforts. Resources available through the Achievement Program will include:

- Examples of how to integrate health and wellbeing strategies into National Quality Standard Quality Improvement Plans
- Policy templates
- Benchmark resources: including practical tips and strategies, and links to additional information and resources

Services participating in the Achievement Program receive a certificate and outdoor sign from the Victorian Government recognising their work in promoting health and wellbeing. As benchmarks for each health priority area are reached, services will receive health promotion icons to add to the sign.

More information on the Achievement Program for early childhood education and care services can be found at www.achievementprogram.healthytogether.vic.gov.au.



Healthy Eating Advisory Service

The HEAS offers information and support on food and nutrition and the provision of healthy food and drinks in education and care services across Victoria. It supports services to work towards meeting the Healthy eating and oral health benchmarks of the Achievement Program and Quality Area 2 of the National Quality Standards.

Through the HEAS, services can access menu and product assessments, healthy recipes and food ideas, menu planning and other resources, and food and nutrition advice via a telephone advice line, email and website. It also provides support and training for food service staff and health professionals who support the services.

More information about the HEAS can be found at www.heas.healthytogether.vic.gov.au

National Quality Framework

Services operating under the National Quality Framework must meet the requirements of the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* (National Law) and the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* (National Regulations).

The assessment and rating process is an important feature of the National Quality Framework which promotes quality education and care services are assessed against the National Quality Standard, the National Law and the National Regulations.

The assessment and rating process comprises a visit to the service by a Children's Services Authorised Officer from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development who will assess and rate each service. This assessment will include observation of what children, families, educators, coordinators and staff members are doing, discussions with educators, coordinators, family day care educators and other staff members about the practices with the service and sighting documentation to support particular practices at the service.

Services will be assessed and rated according to what is occurring in the service at the time of assessment and rating visit. Participation in initiatives or utilisation of services is a great way for a service to strengthen their practice in a particular area of the National Quality Standard, although it does not guarantee a service will be assessed as meeting that standard.

The information below highlights synergies between the National Quality Standard, Achievement Program and HEAS, demonstrating where the Achievement Program and HEAS may support services to strengthen their practice in quality areas of the National Quality Standard.

Quality Area 2: Children’s health and safety

ACECQA requirement	Links with the Achievement Program and VHEAS
2.1 – Each child’s health is promoted.	The Achievement Program supports early childhood services to create healthy environments which support and promote children’s health across 8 priority areas.
<p>2.2 – Healthy eating and physical activity are embedded in the program for children</p> <p>2.2.1 Healthy eating is promoted and food and drinks provided by the service are nutritious and appropriate for each child.</p> <p>2.2.2 Physical activity is promoted through planned and spontaneous experiences and is appropriate for each child.</p>	<p>The Healthy eating and oral health benchmarks encourage services to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop and implement a whole service healthy eating and oral health policy • promote the consumption of fruit and vegetables and healthier food options in line with current Australian Dietary Guidelines • if food is provided, have a menu assessment by the HEAS • encourage children to taste a wide variety of foods • supply safe drinking water • provide a positive eating environment • encourage educators, staff, and families to be positive role models <p>The HEAS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitates a healthy and supportive food environment in services by encouraging provision and promotion of healthier food and drinks • provides menu assessments, advice and resources to support healthy food provision • assists with development and implementation of healthy eating policies and guidelines • builds capacity of food and service staff – through training and professional development <p>The Active play/physical activity benchmarks encourage services to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop and implement a whole service active play/physical activity policy • provide access to a range of environments and equipment that encourage active play • limit or not use screen time • encourage active travel • embed opportunities and experiences to participate in and learn about the importance of active play/physical activity in the curriculum
2.3 – Each child is protected	<p>The Safe environments benchmarks address the prevention of injury and promotion of personal safety within the early childhood environment. They encourage the service to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide a physical environment which is inclusive and safe, enabling access and safe participation by all children • provide learning activities which actively engage, challenge and support children to recognise and appropriately respond to hazardous situations • engage families, local health professionals and community organisations in the development and implementation of safety initiatives.

Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice

Learning and skills is one of the key components of the whole service approach to health and wellbeing advocated by the Achievement Program. Benchmarks for each priority area encourage provision of learning opportunities and experiences within the curriculum which enable children to gain knowledge and skills and take action to enhance health and wellbeing. Benchmarks promote children as active learners who are engaged and supported to plan and participate in the educational program.

Quality Area 3: Physical environment

A healthy physical environment is another of the key components of the whole service approach to health and wellbeing. Benchmarks for each priority area guide the creation of a physical environment which facilitates and encourages healthy choices and lifestyles and supports access and participation by all children.

The Active play/physical activity, Safe environments and Mental health and wellbeing benchmarks encourage services to provide a physical environment which is inclusive and safe, enabling access and participation by all children. Outdoor and indoor spaces, furniture, play equipment and resources should provide a range of opportunities for children to engage in physical, explorative and creative experiences and challenge children to extend and test their limits.

Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements

In a health promoting service the health and wellbeing of staff is valued. The Achievement Program recognises educators and staff as key partners in any whole service approach to health and wellbeing, and values their health through the development and implementation of a staff health and wellbeing policy.

Quality Area 5: Relationships with children

A healthy social environment where respect, fairness and equality is modelled, and a sense of belonging is fostered, is one of the key components of the whole service approach to health and wellbeing advocated by the Achievement Program.

The Mental health and wellbeing and the Safe environments benchmarks encourage:

- the development of respectful and supportive relationships between children, educators, staff and families
- inclusive and participatory practices to create a sense of belonging and connectedness

Engaging children, young people, staff and families is another key component of the whole service approach to health and wellbeing. Benchmarks ensure that structures are established to engage children as active participants in the promotion of health and wellbeing.

Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Engaging children, young people, staff and families is a key component of the whole service approach to health and wellbeing. Benchmarks encourage services to:

- engage families in health and wellbeing initiatives
- provide families with information, ideas and practical strategies to promote health and wellbeing in the service and at home
- develop competencies among educators and staff to facilitate engagement of families and children from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Community partnerships is another key component of the whole service approach to health and wellbeing, which encourages partnerships with local health professionals, services and the wider community to enhance the health promotion capacity of the service, educators and staff and support the health and wellbeing needs of children and their families.

Quality Area 7: Leadership and service management

Effective leadership which promotes a healthy organisations culture is critical to a whole-service approach to health and wellbeing. Benchmarks encourage services to:

- integrate health and wellbeing strategies into service's quality improvement processes
- document health and wellbeing practices in policies which are developed, implemented and reviewed by educators, staff and families and aligned with the service's statement of philosophy
- support educators and staff to access resources, tools and professional learning to enhance their knowledge and capacity to promote children's health and wellbeing

Local health and wellbeing support

In addition to support accessed through statewide initiatives, sources of assistance for health and wellbeing are available locally. Contact the Achievement Program state team on ECEC@achievementprogram.org.au who can help you connect with local health and community professionals in your area, or contact your local government or community health promotion team.

As part of the Victorian Government's new prevention effort, 14 LGAs are participating in the Healthy Together Communities strategy using local partnerships to encourage healthy lifestyles. Early childhood services are encouraged to take part and can receive additional support to promote health and wellbeing. If your service is in one of the following LGAs you can access more information at <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/prevention/healthytogether> or contact ECEC@achievementprogram.org.au to be connected with a member of the team in your area:

- Hume
- Wyndham
- Whittlesea
- Knox
- Greater Dandenong
- Cardinia Shire
- Mildura
- Greater Bendigo
- Wodonga
- Latrobe
- Greater Geelong
- Ararat, Pyrenees and Central Goldfields

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