



The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation was established in 2004 with the sole charitable purpose of improving the health and wellbeing of Australian children and young people. As such, the Foundation welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Diabetes.

Stephanie Alexander AO, one of Australia's most recognised cooks, food educators and authors, established the Kitchen Garden Foundation following the success of the first kitchen garden program piloted in 2001.

The motivation for this work came from Stephanie's awareness of the growing childhood obesity problem in Australia. Over 20 years, the program has impacted over a million children and young people and today operates in more than 1,000 schools nationally.

However, Australian children and young people are still in crisis and need more support. Childhood obesity is escalating year on year, and compounding under the effects of the pandemic and natural disasters.

Overweight and obesity, diet and physical inactivity are the three leading risk factors contributing to type 2 diabetes total burden. ¹

Obesity affects 1 in 4 Australian children 2-17 years old, rising to 1 in 2 young people 18-24 years old. The biggest increase in excess weight gain is from childhood to early adulthood. ²

The World Health Organization recognises schools as effective health promotion settings, and evidence suggests that eating habits, lifestyle and behaviour patterns adopted during childhood endure and can have a significant influence on health and wellbeing in later life. ³

The adults of the future are the children and young people of today, and they need the knowledge, skills and experience to live healthy lives in sustainable and healthy communities.

Responding to the Term of Reference #5 on the effectiveness of current Australian Government policies and programs to prevent, diagnose and manage diabetes.

It is our view that stronger policy frameworks and stronger commitment to programmatic action would increase effectiveness and contribute to disease prevention.

Through the Kitchen Garden Program in schools and services and working collaboratively with community on place-based projects, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation's initiatives are already successfully delivering key government education, health, wellbeing, food and climate priorities for children and young people across Australia.

Our work supports:

- the National Preventative Health Strategy through improving access to and the consumption of a healthy diet by enhancing health literacy in partnership with communities. ⁴
- the National Obesity Strategy by enabling healthier schools and early childhood settings, empowering people to adopt healthier behaviours.
- the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019) enabling schools to meet the individual needs of all learners, aiding education's role in supporting the wellbeing, mental health, and resilience of young people. ⁵
- the Good Practice Guide Supporting Healthy Eating and Drinking at School with the framework to deliver ⁶
 - ✓ Evidence based food literacy
 - ✓ Whole of school approach
 - ✓ Creating healthy school environments, delivery of health and nutrition literacy, and increased physical activity among school-age children and young people

The 2022 Food Policy Index Australia report recommends policy action to “integrate practical skills in growing and cooking foods, as well as nutrition education, into the curriculum for early childhood education and care and all school years in a way that supports existing teaching priorities”. ⁷

In addition, the public consultation process on the National Obesity Strategy highlighted that more than 80% agreed that healthy policies and practices in schools and promotion of healthy behaviours in education curriculum would help to prevent obesity.

Independent academic evaluations show the effectiveness of our work to support government policies through prevention. ⁸

The Kitchen Garden Program is proven to improve food literacy and skills, building individual and community capacity through explicit teaching of cooking and gardening skills, dissemination of easy-to-follow recipes and resources, and exposure to fresh, simple meals.

Children become advocates for the recipes they know and enjoy, building capacity and improving parental motivation to prepare food they know their children will eat.

- Strong evidence of increased child willingness to try new foods
- Statistically significant increases in child knowledge, confidence and skills in cooking and gardening

Furthermore, a systematic review of School Garden Based Programs (SGBP) demonstrates that: ⁹

- Food preferences and dietary habits are shaped at an early age, and are more likely to persist into adulthood affecting food choices in later life
- School is regarded as a prime setting to shape children's dietary behaviour
- SGBP may be a promising, cost-effective intervention to promote healthy eating habits and increase children's fruit and vegetable (F&V) intake
- SGBP show promising effects in improving children's knowledge of food, nutrition, gardening, and science
- Growing own food increases school and/or home accessibility of F&V, and encourages children to appreciate and value garden produce
- SGB interventions that integrate classroom curriculum, physical education, cooking sessions, food service, and/or with parental involvement displayed a promising effect in promoting children's F&V consumption and its determinants
- Active participation in school gardening activities in combination with in-class food and nutrition curriculum strengthens children's horticulture skills, declarative knowledge (what is a healthy diet), procedural knowledge (how to achieve a healthy diet) and conditional knowledge (when and why healthy diet), enabling a higher potential and ability to make better and healthier food choices
- where children are encouraged to freely taste and share self-prepared meals with each other with no pressure to eat, favourable social environments are created for children to try unfamiliar food and potentially reduce food neophobia

Today, there is increased demand on the Foundation for access to our Kitchen Garden Program, as well as our collaboration on community place-based initiatives, but lack of funds remains a barrier for the Foundation, and for schools, early childhood services and communities.

With the obesity crisis worsening, and children and young people in distress, our work offers a holistic approach to addressing health literacy and skills building, while also having an impact on school refusal, learning losses, social connectedness, sustainability and climate anxiety.

There is work to be done to ensure children and young people learn positive food, health, and wellbeing habits for life. We have a solution.

The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program is a **proven, positive, preventative health program** that benefits children and young people, their schools, families and communities.

It is estimated that for every **\$1 invested in preventative public health \$14 is generated in return** to the wider health and social economy.¹⁰

With two decades of expertise, and national reach, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation is positioned to immediately put into operation key government policies and preventative health strategies.

With adequate funding, we can and will support more communities in need at scale. An investment in the work of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation is an investment in the health and wellbeing of Australia.

Dr Cathy Wilkinson

Chief Executive Officer

Mobile: 0417 660 227

Email: cathy.wilkinson@kitchengardenfoundation.org.au

STEPHANIE ALEXANDER KITCHEN GARDEN FOUNDATION

PO Box 104, Abbotsford VIC 3067

Phone: (03) 8415 1993

Email: info@kitchengardenfoundation.org.au

www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au

¹ www.aihw.gov.au/reports/diabetes/diabetes/contents/impact-of-diabetes/burden-of-diabetes

² www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-obesity-strategy-2022-2032

³ www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/12/9/2894

⁴ www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-preventive-health-strategy-2021-2030

⁵ www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration

⁶ www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022/07/the-good-practice-guide-supporting-healthy-eating-and-drinking-at-school.pdf

⁷ www.foodpolicyindex.org.au/_files/ugd/8200a1_02916eab3c5543acae33e219d10273a7.pdf

⁸ www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/content/impact-reach

⁹ www.bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-022-13587-x

¹⁰ www.health.qld.gov.au/research-reports/reports/public-health/cho-report/current/full