



Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation 2023 Pre-budget Submission

There has never been a more urgent need for the Federal Government to invest in the preventative and positive work of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation.

To support the impact of this important work, the Foundation is seeking the Federal Government to restore national funding,¹ enabling more Australian children the opportunity to develop positive food, health, sustainability and wellbeing habits for life.

More specifically, the Foundation is seeking a multi-year investment of \$10-15 million to:

- support/reinvigorate existing Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Programs nationally
- support new schools and early childhood services from areas affected by natural disaster to implement the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program
- assist priority health populations and communities affected by structural inequities including those who are inequitably impacted by the broader determinants of health, by implementation of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program and philosophies.

In addition to the investment sought, the Foundation advocates for pleasurable food education through kitchen garden programs to be embedded in the national curriculum, so that every child and young person has the opportunity to learn the skills required for a healthy life.

Children, young people, and their communities benefited from investment in the Kitchen Garden Program during the Gillard/Rudd governments, but government support was withdrawn during the Coalition years.

\$1 INVESTED in public health → **\$14** RETURNED to the wider health and social economy⁵

THE OBESITY CRISIS

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. The cost of obesity in Australia in 2018 was \$11.8 billion.²

Overlapping crises of pandemic and natural disasters have highlighted issues of food resilience and insecurity, and contributed to further increases in overweight and obesity, decreased physical activity, increased mental health issues, educational losses, and school disengagement. As a result, children are expected to live shorter lives.

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.⁴

It is estimated that for every \$1 invested in preventative public health \$14 is generated in return to the wider health and social economy.⁵

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

DELIVERING IMPACT FOR OVER 20 YEARS

Operational since 2001, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program provides the framework, extensive resources, training, a national community of practice and ongoing personalised support for educators to deliver pleasurable food education with strong links to the Australian curriculum.

Over the past 20 years, the Program has impacted over a million children and young people. Our national community of practice supports educators in over a thousand schools to deliver the Program in all states and territories across Australia.

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, improving parental motivation to prepare food they know their children will eat.

The Program is considered particularly effective at engaging those at risk of disengagement and children with challenging behaviours. Creating links between schools and the community is another valued outcome, with the transfer of Program benefits to the home environment a positive flow-on impact.

Our evidence-based Program supports children and communities to proactively strengthen community resilience and to recover after disasters, improve education outcomes, strengthen social and community inclusion and address health inequities.⁶

“The Kitchen Garden Program teaches sustainability and supports mental health, emotional regulation, children’s understanding of physical health and the value of a healthy diet.”

– RUTH SIMPKINS, DIRECTOR, GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING CENTRE

STRONG HEALTH POLICY ALIGNMENT AND CROSS-PORTFOLIO IMPACT

The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation is an established preventative health program which is successfully delivering key government health priorities to children and young people.

- The National Preventative Health Strategy calls for improving access to and the consumption of a healthy diet by enhancing health literacy in partnership with communities.⁷
- The National Obesity Strategy aims to enable healthier schools and early childhood settings, empowering people to adopt healthier behaviours.²
- Good Practice Guide Supporting Healthy Eating and Drinking at School.⁸

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”.⁹

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.¹⁰

Significant cross-portfolio impacts of this holistic program are outlined below.¹¹

Education	Health	Wellbeing	Environment & climate change	Food systems & agriculture
Cross-curriculum learning and development outcomes are supported, including literacy, cultural studies, health, physical education, STEM and the arts	Children and young people learn practical life skills for growing and preparing fresh, healthy food, improving food literacy and behaviours	Supports students to re-engage with education after pandemic and disasters, as well as build resilience to cope with future such events	Children and young people learn practical skills for sustainability including biodiversity, food system resilience, circular economy, climate change	Children and young people learn about food production, and food systems; links to ag science in secondary
67% 67% of parents said that their child’s experience in Kitchen Garden classes supported other areas of their learning or life skills	87% 87% of parents notice a change in their child’s food choice, knowledge or behaviour as a result of the Kitchen Garden Program	97% 97% of students feel excited to go to school on Kitchen Garden Program day	88% 88% of students reported understanding more about how to look after the environment due to the Kitchen Garden Program	“I work in agriculture and have a passion for food and fibre production in Australia. The KGP was the main reason I chose the school.” – PARENT, WATTLE PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

With Federal Government funding, The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program is perfectly positioned to immediately put into operation these key health strategies.

Pleasurable food education is a fun, hands-on approach to teaching children and young people about fresh, seasonal, *delicious* food so they can form positive food habits for life. The approach engages children and their families, connects communities and positively influences local food cultures. Delivered through a kitchen garden program, pleasurable food education has an array of health, wellbeing, education and community benefits, and aims for longstanding change in the food habits of children in Australia.

Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program

- National
- Evidence based
- Established: 20 years+
- Strong links to curriculum
- Hands-on, experience-based learning
- National community of practice
- Comprehensive across early childhood, primary and secondary
- Holistic approach: food literacy, sustainability, social and emotional learning and wellbeing
- Extensive and ongoing educator guidance, support and training
- 1000+ resources including lesson plans, activities and recipes
- Supports school engagement and community resilience



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