

# ACT Early Childhood Nutrition Hub

Budget Submission 2026 – at a glance

## Purpose

The ACT Early Childhood Nutrition Hub proposes a coordinated, evidence-based approach to improve nutrition in the first five years of life - critical for physical growth, brain development, and lifelong health. This initiative addresses alarming trends in child health and wellbeing in the ACT and leverages early intervention to reduce chronic disease risk and long-term healthcare costs.

## The Challenge

- 31.2% of ACT children are developmentally vulnerable or at risk in physical health and wellbeing vs 21.8% nationally.
- ACT ranks second lowest nationally for children on track across all five Australian Early Development Census domains (43.8% vs 52.9%).
- Almost 1 in 5 kindergarten children are overweight or obese whilst only 2.7% of 5-17-year-olds are meeting recommended vegetable intake.
- Fast-food consumption nearly doubled between 2011-2021.
- Preventable dental caries affects 25.3% of 5-6-year-olds.
- No ACT-wide nutrition standards or funded nutrition support in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings, despite 54% of 0-5-year-olds attending childcare for 34 hours/week.

**31.2%**

Developmentally vulnerable or at risk



**18.2%**

Kindergarten children overweight or obese



**2.7%**

Meet vegetable intake



**25.3%**

Preventable dental caries



## Identified Gaps

Fragmented and inconsistent nutrition messaging and information for families.



Lack of maternal nutrition support during pregnancy.



Limited early intervention for atypical eating behaviours.



No coordinated nutrition support for ECEC services.



## Proposed Solution

Centralised, evidence informed resources and culturally responsive programs for vulnerable families.

Feeding Healthy Futures® – antenatal and early childhood nutrition education.

FEED Program – play-based therapy for children with feeding challenges.

Menu assessments, online training and nutrition support for 200 ECEC services reaching 16,370 children.

## Investment and Impact



**Indicative budget \$1.1M over 3 years**

- Improved child development and maternal health.
- Reduced chronic disease risk and healthcare costs.
- Alignment with *ACT Wellbeing Framework, Best Start for Canberra's Children* and *National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030*.

Investing in the ACT Early Childhood Nutrition Hub will deliver cost-effective, preventive health measures that improve wellbeing, reduce future health expenditure, and position the ACT as a leader in early childhood nutrition.

# ACT Early Childhood Nutrition Hub

A coordinated approach to early childhood nutrition, laying the foundation for a connected and nourished future

## Proposal Overview

The ACT Early Childhood Nutrition Hub will deliver a coordinated, evidence-based approach to early childhood nutrition across the ACT. Nutrition in the first five years of life is critical to physical growth, brain development, and lifelong health. By supporting families and early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings, the Hub will strengthen preventive health outcomes, improve early identification of feeding and growth concerns, and build nutrition expertise in the ECEC sector.

## Rational for Investment

The physical health and wellbeing of children in the ACT is declining with the ACT presenting as one of worst states and territories across all the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) summary indicators of developmental vulnerability. This alarming trend has been worsening over the past decade when compared to National data that has remained relatively stable.

Recent data from the [Australian Early Development Census \(AEDC\) 2024](#) highlights significant concern for the ACT:

- 31.2% of ACT children were classified as developmentally vulnerable or at risk under the physical wellbeing domain, compared to 21.8% nationally.
- the ACT has the second lowest proportion of children developmentally on track (43.8%) across all five AEDC domains in Australia compared to 52.9% nationally.
- The percentage of ACT children 'on track' for physical health and wellbeing declined from 70.4% (2021) to 68.7% (2024) compared to the national data that remained relatively stable at 78.2%. See tables below:

Figure 75 — ACT/Physical health and wellbeing

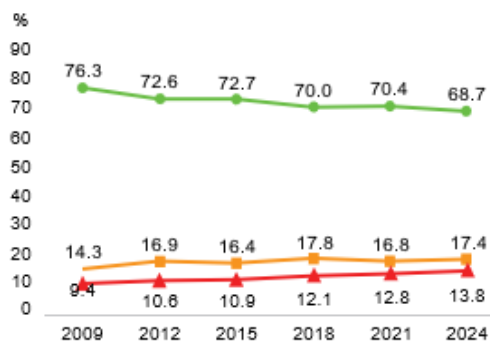
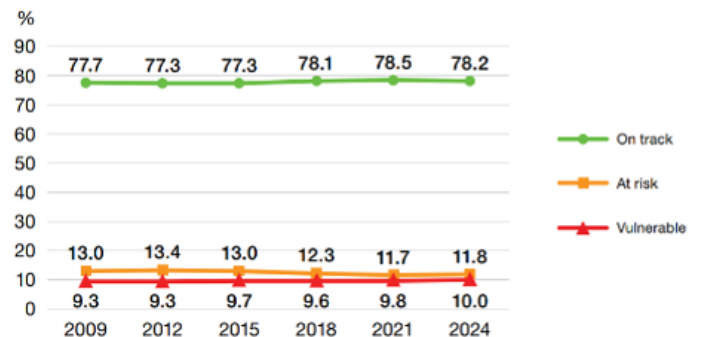


Figure 4 — National trends/Physical health and wellbeing



Source: AEDC National Report 2024

The decline in physical health and wellbeing of children in the ACT can be further evidenced by the following data:

- Nearly 1 in 5 (18.2%) kindergarten children are overweight or obese which has increased from 16.5% in 2014 (ACT Kindergarten Health Check 2021).
- Only 2.7% of children aged 5-17years met the 2013 Australian Dietary Guideline for vegetables in 2021, a downward trend from 6.0% in 2011 (ACT General Health Survey 2011-2021).
- In 2020, more than half of ACT mothers were overweight or obese in their first trimester of pregnancy, an increase from 45.3% in 2012 (Chief Health Officer report Healthy Weight 2023)
- Consumption of fast-food meals almost doubled between 2011 and 2021 (ACT General Health Survey 2011-2021).
- Over one quarter (25.3%) of 5-6-year-old children in the ACT have preventable dental caries (National Child Oral Health Study 2012-14) contributed by excess sugar intake.

According to the [Child Care Subsidy report June quarter 2025](#), 54% of 0–5-year-olds attend early childcare settings for an average of 34 hours per week. Yet there are no ACT-wide nutrition standards or funded nutrition support services in the ECEC sector. This represents a critical missed opportunity for early prevention and health promotion.

Many ACT families face challenges in providing a healthy start for children due to unhealthy food environments, cost-of-living pressures, food insecurity, and declining food literacy. Proper nutrition in the first five years is critical for physical growth, cognitive development, and overall wellbeing, yet there are currently no coordinated public health nutrition programs in the ACT to support families and young children in establishing lasting healthy eating habits.

### Identified Gaps

Coordinated preventive nutrition support in the ACT is lacking. The following critical gaps have been identified in the current early childhood nutrition landscape:

- Limited access to credible information for parents and carers. Families seeking evidence-informed guidance on feeding children aged 0–5 years face fragmented resources and inconsistent messaging.
- No coordinated support for maternal nutrition during pregnancy which is highly affected by misinformation via social media and the internet. This is a significant issue because pregnancy nutrition directly impacts maternal health and foetal development, and poor guidance can lead to long-term health consequences for both mother and child.
- Absence of coordinated nutrition support for ECEC services to help them meet National Quality Standards and create healthy eating environments critical in shaping children’s food habits.
- Limited early intervention dietetic support for children with atypical eating behaviours. Families have minimal access to timely programs that address feeding challenges before they escalate into serious nutritional or developmental issues.

- Inconsistent and ineffective nutrition messaging that is safe, simple, actionable, consistent, from a trusted source and linked with personal benefits that resonate with families.

### Proposed Solution: The ACT Early Childhood Nutrition Hub

The ACT Early Childhood Nutrition Hub will be designed to directly respond to the most pressing gaps in early childhood nutrition support across the ACT. By aligning evidence-based strategies with identified needs, the Hub ensures families, educators, and health professionals have access to consistent, practical, and timely nutrition guidance. The table below demonstrates how each gap will be addressed through targeted initiatives.

Identified Gap	Proposed Solution: ACT Early Childhood Nutrition Hub
<b>Limited access to credible information for parents and carers</b>	Centralised, evidence-informed resources and practical guidance for families via online platforms, community programs (such as Nourishing Little Minds <sup>®</sup> ), and Accredited Practising Dietitian support.
<b>No coordinated support for maternal nutrition during pregnancy</b>	Antenatal nutrition education program (such as Feeding Healthy Futures <sup>®</sup> ) and evidence informed messaging to counter misinformation from social media, ensuring accurate advice for maternal and foetal health.
<b>No nutrition support for ECEC services</b>	ECEC menu assessments, professional development for educators, and subscription-based nutrition support program to help centres meet National Quality Standards and create healthy eating environments.
<b>Limited early intervention dietetic support for atypical eating behaviours</b>	Expansion of play-based nutrition therapy program - FEED in coordination with ACT Health dietitians to address feeding challenges before they escalate.
<b>Inconsistent and ineffective nutrition messaging</b>	Central coordination of nutrition messaging across health, education, and community sectors, ensuring communication is simple, actionable, and resonates with families.

## Financial impacts and the Case for Investment

The ACT faces a significant and growing burden of chronic disease, with almost half of adults living with at least one chronic condition. Critically, one-third of this burden could be prevented by addressing diet related modifiable risk factors - overweight and obesity, poor diet quality, and high blood pressure.

Escalating healthcare expenditure places increasing pressure on the ACT health budget with more than one third (\$2.9b) of its 2025-26 budget being spent on health measures specifically focused on hospitals.

Investing in preventive health measures during early childhood can significantly improve health trajectories, reduce chronic disease risk, and lower long-term costs to the health system.

Only around 2% of the national health budget is allocated to prevention despite strong evidence that preventive health saves money and improves lives. The National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030 has a set target to increase prevention spending to 5% of the health budget, reinforcing the need for urgent action.

The ACT Government wellbeing budgeting approach seeks to address the root causes of poor wellbeing and identifies where investment can have a more immediate impact. Of the six wellbeing priority areas included in the 2025-26 budget, five have a direct association with food and nutrition:

- Children's early years (\$58m) – Nutrition in the first five years is critical for physical growth, brain development, and lifelong health.
- Women (\$180m) – Maternal nutrition during pregnancy and early motherhood directly influences health outcomes for both mother and child.
- Cost of living (\$49m) – Supporting families with practical, affordable nutrition strategies helps alleviate financial stress while improving diet quality.
- Mental and physical health (\$1.196b) – Good nutrition underpins mental wellbeing and reduces risk factors for chronic disease.
- Addressing marginalization and disadvantage – Equitable access to nutrition support ensures vulnerable families are not left behind.

Food and nutrition is a cross-cutting enabler of these priorities. Investing in the ACT Early Childhood Nutrition Hub will deliver measurable benefits across all these areas, improving child development, supporting women's health, reducing chronic disease risk, and easing cost-of-living pressures, while generating long-term savings for the health system.

The ACT government has shown strong commitment in working with the community sector, allocating approximately \$252 million in the 2025-26 Budget to contracts with not-for-profit organisations, to support the delivery of health and community support services. However, there are limited funding commitments incorporating food and nutrition supports in early childhood. This critical gap represents a missed opportunity to address diet-related risk factors early and achieve measurable improvements in health and wellbeing outcomes.

The ACT Early Childhood Nutrition Hub represents a cost-effective investment in preventive health. By embedding nutrition support during the first five years of life, when habits are formed and health trajectories are set, the Hub ensures ACT families receive the guidance they need to prevent obesity, poor diet quality, and related chronic conditions. Every dollar spent on prevention has the potential to save multiple dollars in future treatment costs. This proactive approach not only improves population health outcomes but also alleviates escalating healthcare costs, delivering measurable savings for the ACT health system over time.

### Indicative Budget (ex GST)

<b>Program Component</b>	<b>Description &amp; Reach</b>	<b>3-year cost</b>
<b>Feeding Healthy Futures</b>	3-week education program for up to 400 mothers and children per year (conception–2 years)	\$270,000
<b>FEED 3–5 Years</b>	8-week play-based nutrition therapy program for 64 high need children and parents per year	\$120,000
<b>Food Foundations Subscription</b>	Nutrition Australia ECEC subscription program providing nutrition support and regular online training for 200 centres (reaching 16,370 children)	\$95,000
<b>Nourishing Little Minds in Community</b>	Upskilling of 100 ACT health promotion staff, maternal and child health nurses and playgroup facilitators through established online training to deliver locally tailored play-based food exposure programs	\$50,000
<b>Nourishing Little Minds for Aboriginal children</b>	Co-design of culturally responsive, play based food exposure program in partnership with Yerrabi Yurwang for Aboriginal children and families	\$90,000
<b>ECEC menu assessments</b>	Review of ECEC menus in line with Australian Dietary Guidelines and Best Practice nutrition standards for 50 centres per year	\$140,000
<b>Communication &amp; Promotion</b>	Online presence, booking system, newsletters, social media for ACT population	\$90,000
<b>Advocacy &amp; Coordination</b>	Coordination of ACT early childhood nutrition coalition, position statements, national representation for ACT and wider population	\$75,000
<b>Management &amp; Evaluation</b>	Project governance and coordination including monitoring, evaluation, stakeholder engagement and reporting	\$170,000
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$1,100,000</b>

## Risk Management

The Hub will be delivered by Accredited Practising Dietitians adhering to Dietitians Australia ethical standards, under the governance of an Incorporated Association with ACNC compliance. Staff will maintain current child protection, first aid, and food safety training.

Through comprehensive needs assessment, strong community engagement, and a proven ability to deliver coordinated nutrition support in the ACT, the risk of the Hub not meeting anticipated outcomes is very low. A robust evaluation framework, based on previously successful strategies, will ensure key indicators are regularly monitored and adapted as needed to achieve targets. Registration and participation in Hub activities will be sustained through established referral partnerships with ACT Health and community networks, ensuring accessibility and continuity of engagement.

With the physical health and wellbeing of children in the ACT on a declining trajectory, failing to invest in this approach poses a significant reputational risk for the Territory. As a small jurisdiction that is highly educated and well-resourced, there is no justification for allowing the continued erosion of child health and wellbeing compared to the rest of the country.

## Strategic Alignment

The proposal aligns with key ACT strategies and frameworks including:

- ACT Preventive Health Action Plan 2023–2025
  - Priority 1: Supporting children and families
  - Priority 3: Increasing healthy eating
- Best Start for Canberra’s Children: The First 1000 Days Strategy – highlighting nutrition as essential to lifelong wellbeing.
- ACT Wellbeing Framework – focusing on the ‘Best Start to Life’ health indicator.

The proposal also aligns strongly with national priorities. It aligns with the National Preventive Health Strategy 2021–2030, which emphasizes improving overall wellbeing through greater investment in community-based health initiatives and sets a target of increasing prevention spending to 5% of the health budget by 2030.

Furthermore, with the anticipated release of the updated Australian Dietary Guidelines in 2026, this proposal is a timely opportunity to ensure ACT nutrition messaging is aligned with future national standards, providing consistency and credibility across health and education sectors.

## Proven Track Record of Success

Since 2018, NAACT has been awarded \$667,000 in ACT Health Healthy Canberra Grant funding to develop and pilot multiple early childhood nutrition programs. Each program has been implemented to a high standard, achieving measurable outcomes that have been showcased at national conferences.

Through these initiatives, NAACT has consistently demonstrated its ability to identify community needs, design and deliver evidence-based interventions, and provide comprehensive evaluation and reporting to government across all project deliverables.



Below highlights the ACT Health grant funded programs that have delivered impactful outcomes in the ACT.

**Nourishing Little Minds® in community settings (funded \$109,780 from 2018-2021)**

An early childhood food exposure program proven to increase children’s interest and willingness to try new foods through positive food experiences.

- 17% increase in daily vegetable consumption for 3–5-year-old children.
- 93% improved parent confidence in providing healthy food for children.



*“We prepare food together now and remake all the ideas given in the program and she loves it. As a parent I am making better choices and have ideas to provide her and her siblings.”* Parent of NLM participant.

See appendix 2 for more information.

**Nourishing Little Minds® in Early Childhood Settings (funded \$162,690 from 2020-2023)**

An ECEC educator professional development program to support positive food exposure for children attending ECEC settings.

- 83% of directors reported an increase in children’s positive relationship with food.
- Statistically significant improved educator knowledge, skills and confidence levels to engage children in healthy food-related experiences and influence healthy eating behaviours among children in their care.



*“Great program. We loved it. Positive change in staff attitude. Sharing healthy eating attitudes among staff. Supporting staff well-being. Extends beyond just the children at the centre.”* Participating ECEC director

See appendix 3 for more information.

**Feeding Healthy Futures® (funded \$148,775 from 2022-2024)**

A food and nutrition group education program that spans across three crucial stages in a child’s life – in utero, infancy and toddlerhood.

- Improved dietary intake of pregnant women to meet the nutritional needs of their developing baby.
- 86% breastfeeding continuation at 11 months.



*“The feeding healthy futures sessions have been absolutely fantastic! I liked that they are delivered in a 3-week block, it helped me to really focus on solids while juggling other competing priorities in my brain, including difficulty with sleeping.... I have also attended the ACT Starting Solids course which was good too, however I have enjoyed the more in-depth information provided in this course.”* Participant of Feeding Healthy Futures

See appendix 4 for more information.

**Fuelling Everybody Every Day (FEED) (funded \$246,000 from 2023-2026)**

An experiential nutrition program using Play Therapy to help children with recognised atypical eating behaviors build a positive relationship with food.

- Established waitlist beyond funded capacity (grant funding for delivery concludes in 2025).
- Strong partnerships established with ACT Health, GPs, and allied health services.

The FEED 3-5 year program has demonstrated partnership with the following ACT Health Services:

- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- Child Development Service
- Maternal, Child and Family Health Service
- Women, Youth and Children Community Nutrition Service



*"I hope that the funding keeps coming your way to facilitate responsive feeding programs like this - providing low pressure environments for children and caregivers. This will help circumvent some of the ongoing issues with private feeding interventions for sensitive children e.g., when working within window of tolerance, incurring out of pocket expenses for private sessions are difficult for parents if the children "aren't in the mood", causing them years of unending therapy sessions.*

*While there is a place for private sessions for extreme selective eating, early intervention strategies like this are likely to help prevent exacerbation of issues in a low-pressure environment."* Parent of FEED participant.



## Appendix

### Appendix 1: About Nutrition Australia ACT

Nutrition Australia ACT is a Health Promotion Charity operating as ACT's leading community nutrition voice since 2006. With strong community recognition, NAACT aims to build nourishing, affordable and sustainable food environments for the wellbeing of the ACT and surrounding areas. Children and Youth is a focus area within the NAACT Strategic Plan 2025-2028.

NAACT listens to the community voice and partners with community-based organisations to develop and deliver meaningful initiatives. As a NDIS service provider, NAACT is regularly assessed against NDIS Practice Standards by an independent approved quality auditor.

NAACT established and continues to lead the National Lunchbox Week Campaign providing support and guidance to schools, early childhood and education care (ECEC) services, and families on preparing nourishing food for children whilst at school and care.

#### ACT Nutrition Support Service

The ACT Nutrition Support Service® (ACTNSS) was established by NAACT to provide a holistic nutrition support and advice service across the ACT through the delivery of evidence-based nutrition and healthy eating information and support to targeted sectors within the ACT community.

The ACTNSS was initially funded for three years (2014-2017) through an ACT Health Promotion Grants Program Healthy Canberra Grant. As an engaged and responsive service, the ACTNSS evolved throughout the funded period to provide practical information to support the nutritional health of the population. It has since been leveraged by the ACT Government as a platform in which to maintain the provision of nutrition advisory services supporting the implementation of ACT Government Healthy Food and Drink Policies and delivering against ACT Health initiatives *Fresh Tastes*, *It's Your Move* and *Healthier Choices Canberra*.

Through the ACTNSS, NAACT has successfully established itself as the face of public health nutrition in the ACT. Multi-phased communication strategies, practical nutrition and healthy eating information is developed and disseminated to program subscribers (n=1500), website and social media users (3.6K Facebook followers) and the broader ACT community.

#### Consultation and Collaboration

As a leading not-for-profit, NAACT provides a credible, evidence-based voice to influence the direction of policy. Key collaborative efforts include:

- Partnering with the University of Canberra on research initiatives and is represented on the Discipline of Nutrition and Dietetics Program Advisory Committee.
- Active contributor, leading the intervention stream of the National Nutrition Network in Early Childhood Education and Care - a hub of nutrition expertise in the ECEC sector.
- Representation on the Board of the Federation of Canteens in Schools.

- Representation on the Advisory Group for the development of a 'Best Practice Guide for Food Environments in ECEC Settings' led by Edith Cowan University.
- Representation on the Expert Advisory Group of MRFF Research Grant project titled – 'First do no harm: Implementing Safe Nutrition Messaging in Schools' led by Western Sydney University.
- Supporting Dietitians Australia at Parliamentary Friends in Nutrition events.
- The leading public voice for nutrition in the ACT through regular ABC Radio Canberra interviews, averaging three media appearances per month.

NAACT works in collaboration with local organisations that share a common goal of supporting child nutrition. We have an established relationship with the following community partners and stakeholders:

- ACT Health and Community Services
- ACT Education Directorate
- Barnados
- Canberra Development Clinic
- Canberra Regional Community Services
- Carers ACT
- Duntroon Community Centre
- Galilee School
- Karinya House
- Kippax Uniting Care
- Mackillop Family Services
- Migrant and Refugee Settlement Service
- PCYC
- Perinatal Wellbeing Centre
- West Belconnen Child and Family Centre
- Yerrabi Yurwang Child and Family Aboriginal Corporation
- ABC Canberra Radio and News

## **Appendix 2: Nourishing Little Minds® Community – Final Report Summary (2022)**

The Nourishing Little Minds® (NLM) program is a Nutrition Australia ACT (NAACT) initiative designed to expose children to positive healthy-eating messages, to encourage food exploration in a supportive environment, and to build healthful dietary habits among children aged 0-5years.

The program provided a foundation for participating children and families to adopt and maintain healthy food and drink intake that aligns with the Australian Dietary Guidelines (2013) with a particular emphasis on increasing vegetable intake.

NLM combined early childhood literacy with experiential learning to enrich children's awareness, interest and enjoyment of healthy foods in a safe and familiar environment. The program linked food literacy and hands-on positive food experiences to support healthy eating habits of young children and their families in a library setting. As a multi-component health promotion intervention, NLM consists of reading books portraying healthy messages followed by hands on food exploration/preparation activities.

Delivered in partnership with libraries ACT, a total of 40 x 4-week programs were delivered across 7 libraries. A total of 489 children took part in the NLM program with an accompanying adult who was most often their parent. The total number of anticipated participants was significantly reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred mid-way through the funded period. This also caused significant delays in completing the program deliverables resulting in an 18-month extension to the funded period.

An extensive evaluation framework comprising quantitative and qualitative measures across a range of evaluation tools was implemented.

The program was highly enjoyed by children and parents alike with very positive feedback on a range of elements. Significant health outcomes included children having increased interest and willingness to try new foods and increased overall vegetable consumption. Parent confidence in providing healthy food for their children increased resulting in the establishment in healthier eating habits among children.

The NLM program has been found to improve healthy eating habits among young children aged 0-5 years. This allows the potential for such a program to be upscaled in the community for access by all families in helping children establish lasting healthy eating habits that will ultimately help to prevent the onset overweight and obesity and reduce the risk of lifestyle related chronic diseases.

### **Appendix 3: Nourishing Little Minds® in Early Childhood – Final Report Summary (2023)**

Nourishing Little Minds® in Early Childhood (NLMEC) is a Nutrition Australia ACT (NAACT) initiative designed to maximise skills and opportunities for implementing a positive food and healthy eating culture within early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings. The program was funded by the ACT Government under the ACT Health Promotion Grants Program.

NLMEC involved the research and development of an ECEC educator manual and associated two-hour professional learning (PL) session for participating ECEC services. The face-to-face PL sessions, delivered by experienced Accredited Practising Dietitians, motivated and empowered early childhood educators to encompass healthy food and nutrition learning and play experiences within their centre programming as part of a whole of centre approach to healthy food and nutrition. A kit of resources, comprising a selection of food related children's literature, customisable resources and printed templates with a copy of the educator manual was provided to each participating centre to equip educators with tools and resources to help embed NLMEC practices into their daily programming.

With a focus on upskilling early childhood educators working in long day care settings, a total of 83 face-to-face two-hour PL sessions were delivered between November 2021 to May 2023 reaching 1075 educators. 79 long day care centres took part in the program in addition to one family day care provider and two registered training organisations.

An extensive evaluation framework comprising quantitative and qualitative measures across a range of evaluation tools was implemented.

The program was highly valued by participating ECEC services with 93% of long day care centres still implementing aspects of the NLMEC program 6-months after receiving the training. Participants of the PL were overwhelmingly satisfied with the training they received with 90% of directors interested in receiving repeated training opportunities for their staff in the future.

The PL sessions increased educators' knowledge, skills and confidence to influence healthy eating behaviours among children in their care. Educators received the tools and knowhow to effectively implement healthy food and nutrition elements within their daily practice ranging from healthy role modelling and positive food discussions at mealtimes to integrating healthy food-based story books, songs, games and activities into their routine programming.

The NLMEC program was found to positively impact children's interest in healthy food with 83% of directors reporting that the program was effective in increasing children's positive relationship with food.

NLMEC has been found to be an effective model of nutrition and food positive education within the ECEC sector. By increasing early childhood educators' knowledge, skills and confidence in association with provision of effective learning engagement tools, ECEC services play a crucial role in establishing healthy eating behaviours among children.

## Appendix 4: Feeding Healthy Futures® – Final Report Summary (2025)

Feeding Healthy Futures® (FHF) is a Nutrition Australia ACT (NAACT) initiative designed to promote the importance of good nutrition and establishing a foundation of healthy eating habits during the first 1,000 days of life. FHF was delivered to two primary audiences, with a public-facing cohort open to members of the public, and an organisation specific cohort delivered to participants known to community organisations that support vulnerable populations.

The public facing component involved the research and development of three age specific program phases (pregnancy, infancy and toddler) that ran for three-weeks each. Each phase provided evidence-based nutrition advice delivered by an Accredited Practising Dietitian alongside supporting booklets and resource kits.

The community specific cohort applied a modified approach to suit more vulnerable populations living with greater challenges. Partnering with key organisations supporting these population groups allowed for accessible participation held within familiar locations as part of regular group activities.

A total of 102 FHF sessions, comprising of 34 x 3-week intervention programs were delivered over a 2-year period from March 2023 to February 2025. Of these, 16 x 3-week programs (48 sessions) were delivered to the public-facing cohort, and 18 x 3-week programs (54 sessions) were delivered to the community-specific cohort.

The FHF program reached a total of 248 participants comprising 86 participants from the public-facing cohort and 162 participants from the community-specific cohort.

Key outcomes of the program found:

- Improved dietary intake of pregnant women to meet the nutritional needs of their developing baby
- 87% breastfeeding rates among participants with average age of infant 4 months. Rate of breastfeeding continued at 86% by the time their babies reached 11 months.
- Average age of introducing solids was 5.5 months with 64% of participants introducing solids at 6 months of age.
- 80% of participant's children were receiving daily exposure of each food group by the age of 12 months with 76% being regularly offered family foods.

FHF has shown that dietitian-led nutrition intervention in the first 1,000 days is well received and highly valued within the community and is effective at generating beneficial behaviour change among parents. Ongoing initiatives featuring proven benefits to children in their critical first 1,000 days will continue to be essential in supporting optimal health and wellbeing of children, now and in the future.