

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION AIC 2016: #43

1. Title:

Increasing schools' implementation of a healthy canteen policy: results from three RCTs

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4. Abstract text:

a. Background and aims

Despite healthy school canteen policies being mandated by many jurisdictions in Australia, uptake has been limited. Without population wide implementation, the potential benefits of school policies will not be realised. Research investigating interventions to facilitate the implementation of health innovations, however, is limited. The aim of this paper is to assess the effectiveness of three randomised trials, of varying intensity, in supporting schools implementation of a healthy canteen policy mandated by the NSW Government.

b. Methods

Three randomised trials, with over 200 primary schools, were undertaken within the Hunter New England Region of NSW between February 2014-June 2015. Implementation strategies varied across the three trials including such strategies as; executive support, training, resources, audit and feedback, communication strategies and ongoing support. The primary outcomes for the three trials were the proportion of schools with a canteen menu that did not contain foods or beverages ('red' and 'banned') restricted for sale under the policy; and the proportion of schools where healthy canteen items ('green items') represented more than 50% of listed menu items. Implementation of the policy was measured by menu audits at baseline and post-intervention (9-12 months following baseline) by dietitians, blinded to group allocation.

c. Results

A dose-response relationship between implementation support and policy implementation was found. Results varied across the three trials from non-significant improvements for the primary trial outcomes to absolute improvements greater than 60%.

d. Conclusion

Increasing schools' implementation of mandatory nutrition policies is possible however requires proactive implementation support strategies.