



**A guide to supporting
good oral health in
schools**



dental health
services victoria





Your guide to supporting healthy smiles

Kids should be able to enjoy the benefits of good oral health. They should be free to learn and play without dental disease negatively impacting their eating, sleeping, or ability to concentrate.

In 2019, the Smile Squad free school dental program was launched, transforming dental care for every student attending a Victorian government school.

Smile Squad will deliver free oral health packs, dental examinations, preventive services and follow-up treatment through partnerships with community dental agencies.

You will recognise the bright orange Smile Squad vans on-site at your school.



Smile Squad's oral health promotion component aims to support schools to create an environment that holistically encourages good oral health behaviours.

Smile Squad gives schools the perfect opportunity to highlight oral health as an important part of health and wellbeing and to consider the ways they can foster good oral health.

Kids spend a lot of their time at school, so when schools create an environment where healthy options are available and encouraged, it can help kids to form a lifelong positive approach to healthy eating and oral health.

Smile Squad has developed four simple actions to help schools do this:

- 01** Discretionary food items are discouraged and reduced/removed
- 02** Sugary drinks are discouraged and reduced/removed
- 03** Green food options are encouraged and available
- 04** Healthy eating and oral health information is provided to families and students

In this guide you will find ideas about the ways schools might implement these four actions. Schools are encouraged to think outside the box and implement novel strategies to promote good oral health that may work for their school community.

For more information, contact smilesquad@dhsv.org.au



Health promotion uses multiple strategies to empower people to increase control over and improve their own health.

Watch VicHealth's video [understanding health promotion: a short introduction](#)



Keeping mouths healthy = Eat well, drink well, clean well + oral health checks

When we eat well, drink well, clean well and have regular dental visits, we are keeping our mouths and bodies healthy.

Avoiding too much sugar in our diet, drinking tap water (fluoridated if possible) over sugary drinks, and brushing teeth twice daily with fluoridated toothpaste are key to preventing problems like tooth decay. These behaviours support the clinical services and tools that are provided as part of Smile Squad to achieve good oral health.



A focus on healthy eating and oral health in schools

Healthy eating and oral health have a clear relationship. Free sugars in our diet (think sweet and starchy foods, and particularly highly processed foods) feed the bacteria in the mouth which can cause tooth decay and gum disease. Cutting sugar helps to keep the numbers of harmful bacteria under control, lowering the risk of tooth decay.



Tooth decay is the most common disease affecting Australians. It is mostly preventable.

The provision of food, tap water and other drinks are all areas schools are likely to have some influence on, so it makes sense that these are a focus of the Smile Squad actions. By reducing or removing sugary foods and drinks in favour of delicious, low-sugar options, schools can positively impact student free sugar intake.

Of course, twice daily brushing with fluoridated toothpaste and regular dental checks are also needed to keep mouths healthy. Every year Smile Squad provides a free dental pack to all students to help them achieve this goal.

These are great topics to share with students and families, so this is also included as one of the four key actions.



Want more support?

Vic Kids Eat Well

Smile Squad partners with Vic Kids Eat Well, a new state-wide movement to transform the food and drink environments in schools and other places where children spend their time, including Outside Hours School Care (OSHC). Get involved with Vic Kids Eat Well for clear, achievable steps and support to make changes to your food and drink environment to improve both oral health and overall health.

Vic Kids Eat Well is supported by the Victorian Government and delivered by Cancer Council Victoria in partnership with Nutrition Australia's Healthy Eating Advisory Service.

The Achievement Program

The Achievement Program is a free health and wellbeing program open to all early childhood services, schools, and workplaces. It provides schools with a framework to take a whole-school approach to supporting and encouraging good health.

The Achievement Program recognises healthy eating and oral health as key health priority areas and signing up can help you unlock support to work towards better oral health at your school.





The Achievement Program is supported by the Victorian Government and delivered by Cancer Council Victoria.

Already doing a program? No problem

The four Smile Squad actions align with both Vic Kids Eat Well and The Achievement Program (see Table 1). Choosing to begin your school's focus on healthy eating and oral health with Smile Squad actions can be a good starting point for these formal programs, or a great way to complement the work your school is already doing as part of one of these programs.

While these initiatives operate a little differently, all offer schools a great way to get started on key activities which have the power to improve student oral health and general health and wellbeing.

Table 1 – Alignment of Smile Squad, Vic Kids Eat Well and the Achievement Program

Smile Squad actions	01 Sugary drinks are discouraged and reduced/ removed 	02 Discretionary food items are discouraged and reduced/ removed 	03 'Green' food options are encouraged and available 	04 Healthy eating and oral health information is provided to families and students 
Vic Kids Eat Well Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Refresh the fridge; ditch soft drinks, swap for healthier drinks ✓ Put the fun into fundraising & marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Switch up the snacks; kick confectionary, resize cakes/muffins, healthier snacks ✓ Put the fun into fundraising & marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Change up the menu; boost veggies & salad, skip the deep fryer, healthier pies/pastries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Put the fun into fundraising & marketing
Achievement Program benchmark measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We promote healthy food and drinks and discourage discretionary food and drinks for snacks and lunches. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Our celebrations and events promote healthy food and drink options and limit discretionary options. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Food service staff are supported to provide healthy food and drinks. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Discretionary food and drinks do not appear in any of our schools' fundraising, sponsorship, advertising or marketing activities. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Discretionary food and drinks do not appear in any of our schools' fundraising, sponsorship, advertising or marketing activities. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Water is available indoors and outdoors and actively promoted at all times. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We support staff to take meal breaks, eat healthy and maintain good oral health practices while at work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Our curriculum guides students to develop healthy eating food literacy knowledge and skills to enable them to make healthy food and drink choices and develop a healthy relationship with food. ✓ We teach students to understand the importance of good oral health and promote positive oral hygiene practices. ✓ We actively engage families and the wider community in healthy eating and oral health initiatives. ✓ We provide healthy eating and oral health information to families and the wider community. ✓ Information we provide is evidence based and accessible to the whole school community.



CASE STUDY

Specialist school Kalianna welcomes oral health and healthy food and drink initiatives

Kalianna School, a specialist school in Bendigo with 245 students, has embraced support from two key initiatives to build a healthier school community. Principal Peter Bush talks about the benefits of the Smile Squad school dental service, and Vic Kids Eat Well, an initiative helping schools and other community organisations to boost healthy food and drink options. Supported by the Victorian Government, both services are free.

“Smile Squad has visited our school and our families and students enjoy using their services. Our students need easy instructions so being seen and told to brush twice a day is great. Smile Squad has also provided information for our school to share with students about oral health.”

“Vic Kids Eat Well has helped our school to focus on providing students with healthy food and drink options when they’re at school, with a clear pathway and solid next steps for continuing this journey.”

These connections have assisted Kalianna to build on initiatives they’ve already undertaken, such as their health promoting new café, named ‘The Caf’, which offers low-cost, home-cooked meals for students and staff that are not only delicious, but also nourishing.

Peter Bush recognises the important role of schools in promoting healthy eating and oral health and encourages other schools to join for support.

“In the world of running a school we can get too busy with the normal curriculum and sometimes forget about the importance health plays in everyone’s lives,” he said.

“Programs like Smile Squad and Vic Kids Eat Well can offer fresh voices to bring about change, accountability, resources and knowledge.”

“We want to build on our existing improvements by continuing to help our families and communities to eat well and live healthy lives.”

In undertaking this work, Kalianna School has been supported by [Bendigo Community Health Services](#) and the [Healthy Kids Advisors initiative](#) delivered by the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation.

Visit [Vic Kids Eat Well](#) and [Smile Squad](#) to learn more.



Implementing the four Smile Squad actions

Smile Squad offers schools an opportunity to consider how they can best support their community's oral health. It is designed with flexibility to allow schools to take on what they can manage.

This section gives some ideas about what the four Smile Squad actions could look like in your school.

However, there is no correct way to implement the actions and schools are encouraged to develop novel approaches which best respond to the needs of their community.

It's a good idea to begin sharing information about Smile Squad and oral health with students and families in preparation for Smile Squad visits. Schools can begin implementing Smile Squad actions at any time.



ACTION 1: Sugary drinks are discouraged and reduced/removed

Why?

Sugary drinks contribute to tooth decay and unhealthy weight, which increases the risks of other health problems including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some cancers. By discouraging and reducing/removing sugary drinks within the school environment and promoting healthier alternatives - especially water - schools make it easier for kids to choose drinks that support their health.

You could...

Swap out sugary drinks in your canteen

- Make drink swaps that keep variety in the canteen without the added sugar. You can always do this over time.

Ensure tap water is always available for students

- Allow students to have their water bottles on desks.
- Ensure bottle refill stations/drinking taps are accessible in all parts of the school.

Keep celebrations and events free of sugary drinks

- Try to limit discretionary food and drink items at school-based celebrations and events.
- Find fun ways to include healthier food and drink options. There are lots of healthy school celebration ideas [here](#).

Keep sugary drinks out of fundraisers

- Check out these great suggestions for [food-based fundraisers](#).
- Try running a fundraiser that doesn't involve food at all – [check out these ideas](#).



ACTION 2: Discretionary food items are discouraged and reduced/removed



Why?

Sugary foods can be used for a whole range of reasons: convenience, perceived cost-saving and as treats, incentives and rewards. Across weeks, months and years, the amount of discretionary foods consumed at school can really add up and is often out of line with school intentions to support healthy child development. As with sugary drinks, making high-sugar foods less appealing and reducing their availability encourages more nutritious, tooth-friendly options to become the first choice for students.

You could...

Consider improvements to the canteen

- There are many fun, nutritious foods that can transform your canteen! Check out these [healthy swaps](#).
- Reduce the size of cakes and muffins on offer.
- Replace sweet snacks with more nutritious options.
- Use the free [FoodChecker tool](#) to review your menu and see where you might make improvements.

Encourage healthy packed lunches

- Inspire families and students to create a whole range of healthy packed lunches by sharing this helpful [lunchbox building tool](#) and other helpful resources.

Keep events and fundraisers healthy

- Make food exciting as part of a celebration by providing novel, nutritious options at events and/or fundraisers.
- Check out these ideas for [healthy options for celebrations/ events](#) and options for [fundraisers](#).

Switch up rewards

- Using food (healthy or not) as a reward can impact on a child's relationship with food. Switch to [non-food rewards in the classroom](#) to support better relationships with food.
- Consider what options your school could offer instead of food-based rewards – for example, extra time on an activity of choice?



ACTION 3: 'Green' food options are encouraged and available

Why?

Reducing the availability and appeal of less nutritious 'occasional' foods is one thing, but ensuring students are encouraged and empowered to consume delicious everyday 'green' options is equally important.

The Department of Education and Training Canteens, Healthy Eating, and Other Food Services policy states that green (everyday) foods should make up the majority of a canteen menu and be made available every day the canteen is operating.

You could...

Make your canteen more green

- Use the FoodChecker tool to assess your menu and see where you could include more green options.
- Not ready for a full menu assessment? Use these helpful resources to review and switch up your canteen menu.
- Consider how green food options can be better encouraged and promoted to students.

Engaging in events/celebrations that encourage green food options

- Participate in events such as a Nude Food Day and Healthy Lunchbox Week, or get students to come up with one of their own!

Develop a school garden

- Involving students in the process of growing, harvesting and preparing fruits and vegetables can make them more interested to try new green foods.
- Check out the Victorian Schools Garden Program resources to get started.
- The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation also delivers programs which support schools to develop gardens and integrate them with learning.

What are 'green' foods? The food traffic light system

■ green = everyday foods ■ orange = sometimes foods ■ red = occasional foods

Green foods are those nutritious, everyday options that should make up the bulk of our diet.



ACTION 4: Healthy eating and oral health information is provided to families and students



Why?

Making sure kids have great food and drink choices while at school is a key component of better student oral health. Making sure oral health information and resources are available to students and their families supports positive oral health behaviours outside of school hours.

You could...

Bring more healthy eating and oral health into the classroom

Give students the opportunity to learn about the factors that impact their oral health with free p-12 curriculum-aligned lesson plans across all subject areas:

- **Cool Australia (coming soon)**
Free curriculum-aligned p-12 lesson plans developed by teaching and oral health experts.
- **Phenomenom! (coming soon)**
Detailed lesson plans aiming to increase food literacy covering both primary and secondary grades.

Ensure Smile Squad dental packs are going home

- Smile Squad dental packs are provided before the dental van visits.
- These packs contain a toothbrush and toothpaste to get kids brushing! They are also an important way to inform families about the Smile Squad program and begin a conversation about oral health at home.

Utilise the Smile Squad communications toolkit

- Use this [digital content package](#) to easily share oral health information via newsletters, social media, or other digital communication channels with families.



Information and resources for staff, students and families

DHSV has a range of oral health resources you can share with students and their families:

Tips for keeping teeth healthy

- [Eat well, drink well, clean well brochure](#)
- [Eat well, drink well, clean well brochure – translated](#)
- [Deadly Tooth Tips](#)
- [Deadly Tooth Tips posters](#)

Toothbrushing information

- [How to brush](#)
- [How to brush with a powered toothbrush](#)
- [Caring for teeth and gums 0-6 years](#)
- [Caring for teeth and gums 0-6 years - translated](#)
- [Video: Toothbrushing with toddlers and preschoolers 18mths – 6 years](#)
[in English and 16 community languages]

Oral health information for young children

- [Keeping Teeth Healthy 0-5 years](#)

Oral health tip cards for young adults

- [Tap water is all that](#)
- [Smoking. Worst decision ever](#)
- [Knocked out teeth/mouthguards](#)
- [Good food = great teeth](#)
- [What is fluoride varnish?](#)
- [Dry Mouth](#)

More healthy eating and oral health resources can be found at:

[Better Health Channel](#)

[Raising Children Network](#)

[Rethink Sugary Drink](#)

[Healthy Eating Advisory Service](#)

[Eat for health \(The Australian Dietary Guidelines\)](#)

Find out more about the Smile Squad program at [Smile Squad | dhsv.org.au](https://www.dhsv.org.au)

Next steps...

Use this space to jot down some initial thoughts about how your school can support healthy mouths. Here are a few prompts if you need some help getting started:

Who will lead this work? Who can be a driver of whole of school change?

Who might support the lead(s) and champion change for better oral health?

Who else needs to be on board for actions to succeed? (e.g. students, leadership, families, canteen provider) How will you engage them?

What supports already exist? (e.g. school council, parents and friends group, student leadership group, relationship with a local health promoter, healthy eating or dental practitioner)

Is there a clear starting point for your school? What are you doing well and what are your school's priorities for change to support better oral health for your community?



For dedicated support and resources for planning and implementing change in your school, check out the [Achievement Program](#) and [Vic Kids Eat Well](#) movement.