

HEALTH PROMOTION WITH SCHOOLS: A POLICY FOR THE NSW HEALTH SYSTEM

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The Health Promotion Branch, NSW Department of Health, has led the development of *Health Promotion with Schools: a policy for the health system*, which was endorsed as a health system policy in February 2000. A wide range of people and organisations throughout NSW contributed to the development of this document, particularly the South Eastern Sydney Area Health Service, the Northern Sydney Area Health Service, and the NSW Department of Education and Training.

The NSW health system makes a significant investment in NSW schools, but are we maximising our return on this investment? The policy is a formal statement of direction for the NSW health system, which provides a framework for response to this question. NSW Health recognises the potential of settings such as schools in promoting the health of children during a critical period when knowledge, attitudes and behaviours influence lifelong health. In addition, NSW Health has a commitment to working in partnership with other sectors to address health issues, such as nutrition and injury; and the underlying determinants of health, such as socioeconomic conditions and education. The policy has been developed in close consultation with the education sector in NSW with the aim of providing a shared understanding of the context within which the health sector can better work with schools.

Health Promotion with Schools: a policy for the health system has been designed to develop a uniform and effective code of practice for health workers undertaking health promotion in schools. The policy has been informed by research and expert recommendations at both national and international levels.^{1,2,3,4,5}

The policy:

- provides an effective guide for personnel working to develop health promotion with schools;
- provides a framework whereby the work of health personnel may be more consistent with better practice;
- sets out a case–argument for the value of a comprehensive and planned approach to school health promotion using a ‘whole school’ approach;
- provides a mandate to adopt a more comprehensive, planned approach and to guide practices of health

personnel away from ineffective ad-hoc interventions, for example: providing one-off education sessions;

- increase awareness of the advantages of health and education personnel working in partnership with each other;
- encourage partnerships with other key organisations for health promotion in schools.

In addition to providing direction for the NSW health system, the policy clarifies what the education sector can expect from the health system when they are working together to improve the health of school communities. *Health Promotion with Schools: a policy for the health system* provides a framework that reflects better practice for working with schools to promote health, and will provide a useful foundation from which the health system can move towards an effective working relationship with schools.

REFERENCES

1. National Health and Medical Research Council. *Effective School Health Promotion, Towards Health Promoting Schools*. Canberra: NHMRC Health Advancement Standing Committee, Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, 1996.
2. World Health Organization. *The Jakarta Declaration on Health Promotion in the 21st Century*. Jakarta: WHO, 1997.
3. International Union for Health Promotion & Education. *The Evidence of Health Promotion Effectiveness: Shaping Public Health in a New Europe*. Luxembourg: ECSC–EC–EAEC, 1999.
4. Australian Health Promoting Schools Association for Public Health Division. *Draft National Strategy for Health Promoting Schools 1998–2001*. Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, 1997.
5. NSW Department of Health, NSW Department of School Education Curriculum Directorate, Catholic Education Commission (NSW), Association of Independent Schools (NSW). *Towards a Health Promoting School*. Ryde: NSW Department of School Education, 1996. ☞

Health Promotion with Schools: a policy for the health system, along with other guidelines for health and education workers, can be located on the NSW Department of Health’s Web site at www.health.nsw.gov.au, or by contacting the Health Promotion Branch by telephone on (02) 9391 9540.