

RESPONDing to childhood obesity

Dr Jill Whelan, Professor Steven Allender, Andrew Brown, Dr Josh Hayward, Alfred Deakin Professor Anna Peeters, Dr Michelle Jackson, Monique Hillenaar and Dr Melanie Nichols, Global Centre for Preventive Health and Nutrition. Emeritus Professor Marj Moodie, Deakin Health Economics. Professor Colin Bell, Determinants of Health.

Partner organisations: Department of Health Victoria, VicHealth, Victorian Department of Education and Training, see the full list on the [Institute for Health Transformation's website](#).

The challenge

In 2017-18, almost 25% of Australian children aged 5-17 experienced overweight and obesity.*

Research has shown that childhood obesity can be impacted by several complex factors, ranging from an individual's biology to the way our food systems work.

Consequently, it's important that interventions to prevent childhood obesity take a systems approach and aim to increase a community's capacity to address both healthy eating and physical activity.

Our response

Led by Professor Steve Allender at the Institute for Health Transformation's Global Centre for Preventive Health and Nutrition, the RESPOND (Reflexive Evidence and Systems interventions to Prevent Obesity and Non-communicable Disease) study uses systems thinking and community knowledge to tackle childhood obesity in Victoria.

Systems thinking is a process of taking into account all the factors that may impact someone's health and wellbeing.

Since 2015, the RESPOND team has worked with communities in the Ovens Murray and Goulburn regions of Victoria to help them use systems thinking to identify actions that they can take within their communities to

create healthier food environments and get local children to be more active.

The results

More than 400 changes have been implemented across RESPOND communities to support and encourage healthy choices. These included improving access to drinking water, creating school drop off zones that encouraged children to walk a short distance to school, health services changing their menus, screen time reductions and bans on the sale of sugar-sweetened food and drink in regional health services.

The impact

RESPOND has had a significant impact on the continued development of the tools, methods and structures being used to build capacity for systems thinking in prevention.

Insights from the implementation of RESPOND led to the development of Connecting the Dots, a systems thinking training module offered to participants of the [VicHealth Local Government Partnership](#). This has extended the usages of RESPOND's tools and methods to 12 more Victorian local government areas.

Internationally, health promotion practitioners in the UK, Denmark, Canada, Sweden, Poland, Portugal, Norway and the Netherlands have participated in the systems thinking capacity building process that underpins RESPOND and are using these tools to guide local approaches to the prevention of complex health problems.

Janette Lowe, Executive Officer of the Southern Grampians Glenelg Primary Care Partnership said RESPOND shows the power of local communities to solve the difficult problem of childhood obesity.

"This project reinforces that to achieve healthier outcomes, communities need to be in the driver's seat, leading the change with government and experts in a supporting role," she says.

RESPOND is funded by Victorian Department of Health, Victorian Department of Education and Training, VicHealth, Goulburn Valley Primary Care Partnership, NHMRC, Susan McKinnon Foundation.



INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH
TRANSFORMATION



For more information, visit the [Institute for Health Transformation's website](#).



Deakin University CRICOS Provider Code: 00113B

*[Overweight and obesity among Australian children and adolescents, Summary Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)