

DEVELOPING NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR ADOLESCENT NUTRITION EDUCATION

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The need to improve the profile and effectiveness of nutrition education is well recognised (NH & MRC 1988). Traditional focus on knowledge and attitudes has limited influence on food related behaviour. This paper describes the initial step in the development of a process for establishing school based nutrition programs. Central to these programs will be a strong community orientation and goals framed in behavioral terms.

The PRECEDE model (Green et al. 1980) was adopted to conduct needs assessment emphasising the investigation of those predisposing, enabling and reinforcing factors that influence specific food related behaviours. Following a literature review a group of practitioners with expertise in dietetics, nutritional epidemiology and education collaborated on the determinants of nutrition related behaviour in adolescents. Possible relationships between these factors were mapped using influence trees and oval diagrams (Delp et al. 1977) as an aid to the development of a conceptual framework. Based on this framework semi-structured focus interviews were conducted with 204 year eight, 9 and 10 students to determine the relevance of these factors and identify additional factors related to food behaviour. Interviews were transcribed and data were collated and searched for recurrent themes. These themes were then used to amend the original conceptual framework.

From the results it is hypothesised that the food eaten by adolescents is a function of food preference and access to food. Factors affecting food preference were identified as predisposing factors while those affecting access to food were considered enabling factors. Determinants of food preference included knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, perceptions, mood states and the taste of food. Parents, media and school were commonly cited as the main source of nutrition information. Access to food was affected by the variety of food available especially at home and in the school canteen. The knowledge, attitudes and skills of meal planners and the facilities available to them undoubtedly influence the variety of food available. The degree of adolescent involvement in meal planning and preparation, and the convenience of food were also found to influence food choices.

These qualitative data will provide the basis for the development of a questionnaire to be used to assess the nutritional needs of adolescents in Queensland school communities.

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