

Shoalhaven Healthy Lifestyles for Families Network

The annual survey of local general practitioners conducted by the Shoalhaven Division of General Practice identified a commonly recurring need for child obesity management and prevention strategies.

A range of practitioners from different organisations wondered how they could work together to address child obesity by supporting and building on the range of projects in the area



In 2004 the Shoalhaven Childhood Obesity program commenced with the assistance of funding from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

Key strategies were to:

- Increase general practice capacity to significantly impact on childhood obesity in the clinical setting by helping children and their families understand and successfully engage in positive lifestyle changes.
- Facilitate a more coordinated early intervention approach to the prevention and management of overweight or obese children through improved working relationships between general practitioners and other key health professionals.
- Increase community awareness of the issues of childhood obesity and promote individual and community strategies that will encourage necessary change to achieve healthier weight in children.

A collaborative network of organisations named *Shoalhaven Healthy Lifestyles for Families Network* was formed to avoid duplication of services and promote a cohesive community approach. The network's principle aim is to *promote a supportive community environment which reduces the incidence of childhood obesity*. This was achieved through the promotion of local initiatives, commitment to joint interventions, advocacy and the encouragement of change at an individual, family, worksite and community level.

Key network achievements include:

- Councillor briefing on the impact of child obesity on the community
- Interactive stand at local agricultural shows 2006-2009
- *Shoalhaven Healthy Kids Forum 2006*: a forum for professionals
- *Shoalhaven Health Kids Community Forum 2007*: addressing healthy lifestyles for children under 12 years
- Ongoing social marketing campaigns
- Mapping the availability and capacity of services across the Shoalhaven to address childhood obesity
- Mapping free family based activities across the Shoalhaven
- Development of community resources
- Supermarket tours; nutrition tips for schools; community education
- Role of Network as a resource to help build expertise in the community and health sector

The network has endeavoured to:

- Shape attitudes in the Shoalhaven by raising awareness of environmental and lifestyle factors that influence our children

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- Encourage public policy to provide increased access to healthy food choices, increased opportunities for physical activity, and safe and healthy communities .
- Ensure a collaborative partnership approach to joint planning, implementation and evaluation of related initiatives and interventions across the Shoalhaven.
- Share information, resources, expertise, funding opportunities.
- Support health professionals in addressing healthy weight issues.