

The SWAP IT lunchbox program works and is ready to be used in more schools



Background

In Australia, almost 30% of primary school aged children are overweight or obese. This is nearly double the number in other high-income countries. Australian children eat a lot of unhealthy food and drinks like chips, biscuits, cake, and fruit juice. These are high in added fat, salt, and sugar, and don't provide the nutrients that children need.

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- *Unhealthy foods make up 40% of the food Australian children eat.*
 - *4 – 8-year-olds eat 10 times more unhealthy foods than they should.*
 - *9 – 11-year-olds eat 3 times more unhealthy foods than they should.*
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What children eat and drink at school affects their concentration, health, and wellbeing – now and into the future.

What is this research about?

We can improve children's nutrition through school-based programs. SWAP IT is an app-based program that helps parents change what they pack in their children's lunchboxes.

We have proven that SWAP IT works and doesn't need to cost a lot. It is now ready to be used in more schools.

Why target school lunchboxes?

More than 85% of school children take a packed lunch to school every day. Lunchboxes are often packed with unhealthy snack foods like chips, biscuits, cake, and fruit juice.

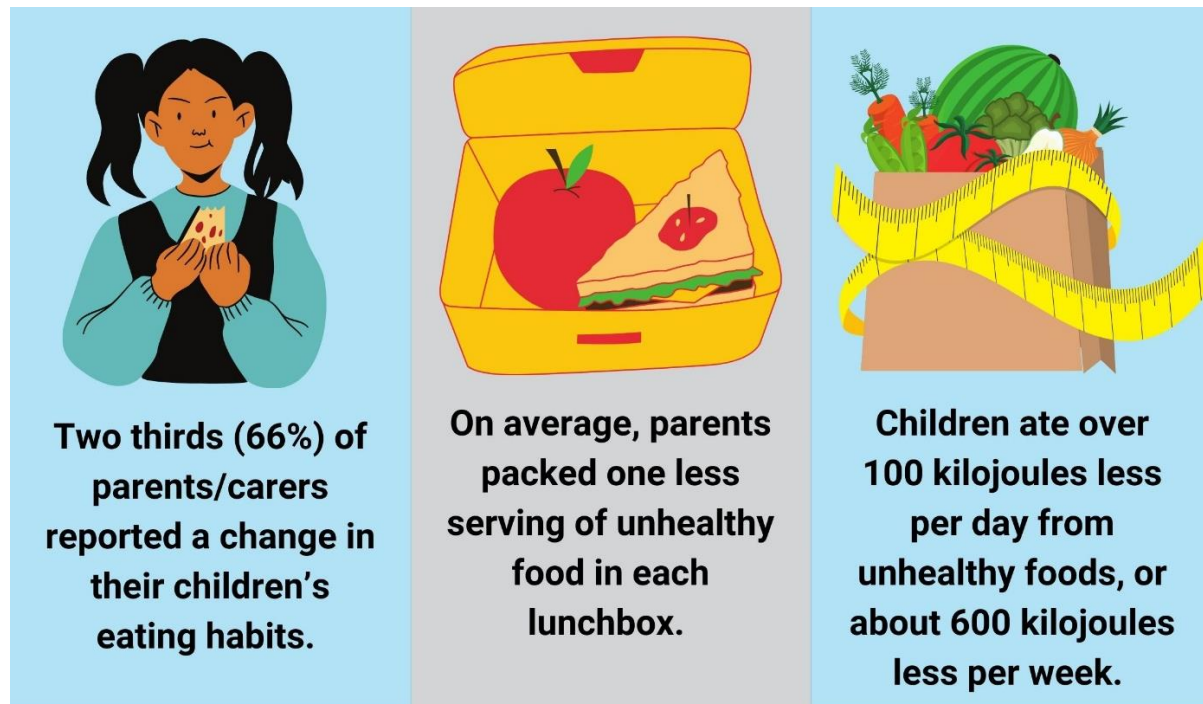
How does SWAP IT work?

SWAP IT works as part of the SkoolBag App that many schools already use to deliver information to parents and carers. Parents/carers also receive an information booklet. The app and booklet encourage simple lunch box swaps, replacing unhealthy foods with healthy foods.

SWAP IT sends app notifications once a week for ten weeks, with an attention-grabbing headline. There are pictures of lunchbox swap examples and messages about common reasons parents have for not packing a healthy lunchbox. There are also links to videos, health organisation websites and email addresses for further information. The information stays on the app's content feed so that parents can refer to it later.

What are the benefits of SWAP IT?

Our research found that the SWAP IT program reduces the amount of unhealthy food in children's lunchboxes:



These changes in children's eating habits are important because they could reduce the numbers of obesity and type 2 diabetes. This will save the healthcare system up to \$1.35 million.

What do parents and principals think of SWAP IT?

Both parents and school principals approve of the SWAP IT program:

- Nearly 70% of parents and carers agreed that SkoolBag was the best way to get information about healthy school lunch boxes.
- More than 80% of parents and carers thought it would be helpful to keep getting SWAP IT messages through the SkoolBag App.
- Over 70% of parents/carers opened four or more lunch box messages on the SkoolBag App.
- 100% of school principals said they would recommend the program.

"This program worked because the information provided was easy for parents to receive, understand and act on. And it required very little work or effort on the part of the school."

- Cameron Osborne, Principal of Wauchope Public School

Will it work for all schools?

Our studies have shown that SWAP IT works in:

- big schools and small schools,
- city schools, regional schools, rural schools, and remote schools,
- schools in high-income areas and low-income areas.

How much does the program cost?

Our studies tested different versions of the SWAP IT program, with different costs:

- A full program included the app and booklet plus nutrition guidelines for the school and curriculum lessons for teachers at the school. This version costs \$1800 per school.
- The version of SWAP IT that uses only the booklet and app costs from \$45 per school.

The good news is that the app and booklet version of the SWAP IT program works just as well as the whole-of-school version.

What happens next with the SWAP IT program?

The SWAP IT program is available to be used in a variety of schools. The full program can be made available to schools, but it is not necessary to change children's eating habits. The booklet and app version is cheaper, meaning that more schools will be able to use this version and get the same results.

We are hoping to get support to make the SWAP IT program available to many more schools.

About us

This research is being done by researchers at the National Centre of Implementation Science (NCOIS). NCOIS is an NHMRC funded Centre for Research Excellence associated with the University of Newcastle. The research is led by Dr Rachel Sutherland.

Key contact: Dr Rachel Sutherland – rachel.sutherland@health.nsw.gov.au



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