

"SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES SHOULD SUPPORT THE ADOPTION OF HEALTHY DIETS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY"



SCHOOL POLICY FRAMEWORK

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WHO
GLOBAL STRATEGY ON DIET,
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH



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INTRODUCTION

Growing burden of disease

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are by far the leading cause of death in the world and their impact is steadily growing. In 2005, 35 million people died from NCDs which represents 60% of the total number of deaths in that year. Moreover, between 2005 and 2015, deaths due to NCDs are projected to increase by 17%. This largely invisible epidemic is more serious in low- and middle-income countries, where 80% of all NCDs occur.

The main causes of NCDs are known. A small set of common risk factors are responsible for most of the major NCDs; unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and tobacco use. Elimination of the modifiable risk factors would prevent 80% of premature heart disease, 80% of premature stroke, 80% of type 2 diabetes and 40% of cancer.

Children are not immune to this burden. Overweight children, and obesity and type 2 diabetes in children and adolescents are an increasing problem. Globally, nearly 22 million children under 5 years of age are overweight. Overweight and obese children are likely to stay obese in adulthood and more likely to develop NCDs like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases at a younger age.

Effective interventions are available and urgent action is required (1).

Mandate

In response to the growing burden of NCDs and in order to reduce the impact of major risk factors such as unhealthy diet and physical inactivity, the World Health Assembly adopted the "Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health" (DPAS) in May 2004. As one measure, DPAS calls upon Member States to develop and implement school policies and programmes that promote healthy diets and increase levels of physical activity.

Paragraph 49 of DPAS states: "School policies and programmes should support the adoption of healthy diets and physical activity. Schools are encouraged to provide students with daily physical education and should be equipped with appropriate facilities and equipment. Governments are encouraged to adopt policies that support healthy diets at school and limit the availability of products high in salt, sugar and fats" (2).

Existing WHO initiatives on school health

Table 1 summarizes the main global initiatives of the World Health Organization (WHO) in the field of school health. The DPAS School Policy Framework builds upon this existing knowledge and experience. Moreover, the framework adds a global policy tool that focuses on governmental action to improve dietary patterns and increase physical activity in the school setting. National or sub-national school policies are expected to be of immense help to local schools in their efforts to promote healthy eating and physical activity.

TABLE 1: Global initiatives on school health in which WHO is a partner

INITIATIVE	GOAL	STAKEHOLDERS TARGETED
Global School Health Initiative (including different networks of health-promoting schools) www.who.int/school_youth_health/gshi	Increase the number of health-promoting schools (reward programme)	Schools
Focusing Resources on Effective School Health (FRESH) www.freshschools.org	Raise awareness in the education sector of the value of implementing effective school health programmes as a major strategy to achieve Education for All (advocacy)	Schools via ministry of health
Nutrition-Friendly Schools Initiative (NFSI) (in piloting phase) www.who.int/nutrition/topics/nut_school_aged	Increase the number of nutrition-friendly schools (reward programme)	Schools
Global School-based student Health Survey (GSHS) www.who.int/chp/gshs	Support Member States to measure and assess the behavioural risk factors and protective factors in 10 key areas among young people (surveillance)	Governments

Purpose and target audience

The purpose of the *DPAS School Policy Framework* is to guide policy-makers at national and sub-national levels in the development and implementation of policies that promote healthy eating and physical activity in the school setting through changes in environment, behaviour and education. This framework is one of the tools that WHO is producing and disseminating to assist Member States and stakeholders to implement DPAS.

The *DPAS School Policy Framework* primarily targets ministries of education and ministries of health, as in most Member States they are responsible for school health policies. Other ministries such as finance, agriculture, transportation, physical environment, sports, recreation, culture, and other stakeholders are however also encouraged to utilize this framework to improve eating and physical activity habits in the school setting. Depending on the local situation, policy-makers may operate at a national, sub-national, regional or local level.

The *DPAS School Policy Framework* is primarily intended for low- and middle-income countries, but many elements of the framework are also suitable for high-income countries. The document is intended for countries that have not started developing a school policy as well as for those that already have (parts of) a school policy.

Expert round table

In order to initiate the development of the *DPAS School Policy Framework*, WHO organized a meeting of experts on 6–7 June 2007 in Vancouver, Canada. The main objectives of this meeting were to review and discuss current knowledge and evidence of national and sub-national school policies on diet and physical activity, and to draft an outline for the *DPAS School Policy Framework*. As a follow-up to this meeting the participants of the expert round table (see Annex 1) reviewed drafts of the *DPAS School Policy Framework*.

How to use this document

This document describes the core elements of the development and implementation of a national or sub-national DPAS school policy. Chapter 2 describes how to start a school policy. Chapter 3 focuses on the different policy options available to policy-makers. Chapter 4 explains how to involve stakeholders. Chapter 5 provides guidance on monitoring and evaluation. Annex 2 includes examples of school policies in four WHO Member States.

Countries are encouraged to adapt the generic *DPAS School Policy Framework* in accordance with their own needs and circumstances. While it is not necessary to adhere strictly to the steps outlined in this framework, it is important to ensure that the core elements of the development and implementation of a school policy are included.

In the adaptation of the generic *DPAS School Policy Framework* to the local situation, countries are encouraged to directly engage children and adolescents. They possess immense potential for developing new, creative and, most importantly, appealing ideas for improving diet and physical activity behaviours in the school setting (see also the section on students in Chapter 4).

Each Member State is encouraged to establish its own priorities, in collaboration with all parties concerned, to decide the extent to which the components presented in the *DPAS School Policy Framework* are to be addressed. It is more important to start with small changes that are achievable than to wait until resources become available to address all of the components simultaneously.

STARTING A SCHOOL POLICY

Starting an effective school policy to promote healthy eating and physical activity requires national strategic leadership (3). Therefore, governments are encouraged to:

- set up a coordinating team to guide school policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- conduct a situation analysis;
- develop a workplan and monitoring system;
- set the goals and objectives;
- disseminate the policy

Set up a coordinating team

It is important to ensure that a multisectoral coordinating mechanism, which draws upon existing structures, is present to promote healthy eating and physical activity in schools. The coordinating team should include members from all stakeholder groups (see Chapter 4), provide leadership at the national level and define mechanisms for internal leadership. The coordinating team should aim to facilitate and promote integration of joint work from all relevant stakeholders from all levels (national, regional and local).

Although the appropriate roles for the team are to be determined at the country level, a range of possible roles is proposed below.

- Facilitate the development and implementation of a national school policy, including resource mobilization.
- Take the responsibility to advocate and guide policies, actions (including research), and strategies implemented by various stakeholders.
- Coordinate actions of different stakeholders at various administrative levels (national, regional and local).
- Monitor different programmes aimed at promoting healthy eating and physical activity in schools and report on a regular basis.

The coordinating team should be accountable and transparent in its work. Leadership of the team may be joint or rotating e.g. between ministries of education and health, but should ultimately be left to the country to determine (4).

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