

Munch & Move 2020 Healthy Eating and Active Play Conference Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

The *Munch & Move* Healthy Eating and Active Play Conferences aim to strengthen knowledge, skills and confidence of early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector leaders, in relation to implementation of the *Munch & Move* program. In order to formally assess the effectiveness of these Conferences, an outcome and impact evaluation has been conducted. Three Conferences are included in the evaluation, resulting in data from a range of metropolitan and regional ECEC settings.

Methods include statistical analysis of before and after quantitative surveys, and thematic analysis of in-depth, post-Conference interviews. Results show increases in all pre-to-post quantitative measures, in addition to several key interview themes that demonstrate enhanced *Munch & Move* implementation following Conference attendance.

The evaluation finds that attending a Healthy Eating and Active Play Conference supports ECEC leaders to more effectively and collaboratively embed evidence-based nutrition, physical activity and screen time practices in their services. This supports the development, health and wellbeing of children in these NSW ECEC settings.

Two virtually delivered Conferences will be evaluated using the same methodology in 2021. This will allow for an outcome and impact comparison between online and face-to-face Conferences.

Introduction

Childhood overweight and obesity is a serious public health concern. In 2020, approximately 1 in 5 NSW children aged 5 to 16 are above a healthy weight. These children are at increased risk of becoming overweight or obese adults, leading to ongoing, increased risk of chronic disease, mental illness and premature mortality (NSW Ministry of Health, 2020).

Preschool-based obesity prevention interventions in Australia have been effective in eliciting changes to children's movement skills, food intake and a reduction in overweight and obesity in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings (Zask et al, 2012; de Silva-Sanigorski et al, 2011; Bell et al, 2015). Healthy lifestyle behaviour change strategies in these settings have also been sustainable following intervention (Adams et al, 2011). Moreover, health promotion professional development for early childhood educators in the United States of America has resulted in increased educator knowledge, improved health-related policies and decreased Body Mass Index for children in ECEC services (Van Stan et al, 2013; Alkon et al, 2014). These findings emphasise the importance of health promotion interventions targeting educators and young children in ECEC settings. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) data indicates that on a typical day, over 300,000 children attend ECEC services in NSW, highlighting the potential reach of statewide interventions in the ECEC sector.

Munch & Move is a free, statewide NSW Health program that aims to prevent overweight and obesity in young children attending ECEC settings. The program strengthens the capacity of NSW early childhood educators to promote and elicit healthy eating, physical activity and reduced screen recreation for children from birth to 5 years in their services. Following initial program training, participating educators and services are given resources, ongoing professional development and implementation support from local health district (LHD) program support officers.

Munch & Move aligns with ECEC regulatory requirements and approved learning frameworks, including the Education and Care Services National law and regulations, the *National Quality Framework*, the *National Quality Standard* and the *Early Years Learning Framework*. The program is

managed by the NSW Ministry of Health and is part of the NSW *Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy* (NSW Ministry of Health, 2013). *Munch & Move*'s best practice elements reflect several key actions from the World Health Organization Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity (WHO, 2017; WHO, 2016), in addition to Strategic Objective 2 of the *NSW First 2000 Days Framework* (NSW Ministry of Health, 2019).

As of 30 September 2020, 3,571 NSW centre-based ECEC services (i.e. long day care, preschools and occasional care) and 94 NSW family day care (FDC) service providers are participating in the *Munch & Move* program. Program outcomes are measured through ongoing implementation and review of a set of adoption indicators, known as practices, in participating services. A program evaluation in 2015 demonstrated that statewide adoption of all practices had increased from 2012 to 2015 (Lockeridge et al, 2015). All practices were strengthened through a rigorous evidence review in 2017 and statewide adoption has continued to improve from 2017 to 2020.

In order to further strengthen *Munch & Move* practice adoption, the NSW Ministry of Health engaged Early Childhood Australia (ECA) in 2017 to deliver 10 Healthy Eating and Active Play (HEAP) Conferences to NSW centre-based ECEC service leaders (i.e. directors, nominated supervisors and educational leaders). These Conferences were held in multiple locations across NSW, with support from LHDs. They extended on the *Munch & Move* Program Training, with a focus on reinforcing program key messages, addressing lower-achieved practices and contributing to the overall development of the ECEC workforce. The Conferences were a success, with 742 delegates from 639 ECEC services attending across 2017 and 2018.

A total of 15 updated HEAP Conferences were delivered by the ECA in 2019 and 2020. In addition to centre-based service leaders, these updated Conferences were open to FDC service providers. Each LHD was allocated at least one Conference, with the focus again being on strengthening whole-of-service program implementation. The Conferences were also endorsed by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), for five hours of professional development for teachers maintaining Proficient Teacher Accreditation. Leading early childhood experts were engaged by ECA to deliver the following Conference sessions:

- *Conversations with Families*: managing challenging conversations with families in relation to the *Munch & Move* key messages.
 - o Presented by Jill McLachlan and Catharine Hydon
- *Service Management*: leadership strategies to motivate and support ECEC educators to successfully implement *Munch & Move*.
 - o Presented by Catharine Hydon
- *Programming with Play*: strategies for embedding age-appropriate active play experiences in ECEC services, including the fundamental movement skills.
 - o Presented by Dr Luke Touhill and Dr Yeshe Colliver

LHD representatives were also given the opportunity to deliver a Conference session on local program supports, resources and case studies. These sessions could take the form of a presentation from LHD program support officers, or a panel discussion involving local ECEC service leaders.

In order to assess the outcomes and impacts of the updated HEAP Conferences, the NSW Ministry of Health commenced a mixed-methods evaluation in January 2020. The evaluation team consisted of a *Munch & Move* State Project Officer and a CPH Senior Evaluation Officer, with input from the *Munch & Move* State Program Manager and support from ECA.

The aim was to evaluate outcomes and impacts for five 2020 Conferences. However, with restrictions on gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic the CPH and ECA were unable to deliver the final two Conferences, scheduled for March and May 2020. The following three Conferences were therefore included in this evaluation:

- 12 February 2020, Sydney Olympic Park, Sydney LHD
- 13 February 2020, Albury, Murrumbidgee LHD
- 11 March 2020, Ballina, Northern NSW LHD

In total, 132 ECEC services leaders from 114 services across these LHD regions were in attendance.

Evaluation Aims

Primary: To assess whether attendance at a *Munch & Move* HEAP Conference increases participants' knowledge, skills and confidence in implementing policies, practices and strategies that will enhance *Munch & Move* practice achievement.

Secondary: To explore the barriers and facilitators for translating this knowledge into practice.

Methods

ECEC service leaders attending HEAP Conferences in Sydney, Albury and Ballina were invited to complete a quantitative survey, which was developed by the evaluation team. The survey was administered before and after each Conference to assess any changes in participants' confidence, knowledge and skills in relation to *Munch & Move* implementation. The pre- and post-Conference surveys provided participants with several statements and asked to score themselves on a five-point Likert Scale. The surveys also gave participants the chance to identify strategies they intended to use via two multiple-choice questions.

Pre-Conference surveys were circulated to participants via ECA's online event management system as part of the registration process. All participants were provided with a participant information sheet, outlining how their responses would be stored and analysed. Hard copy pre-Conference surveys were also provided at event check-in to several participants who were attending in place of someone who had registered but could not attend. Responses to hard copy surveys were then collected before keynote sessions commenced.

Post-Conference surveys were disseminated to all delegates at the close of each Conference, and collected by ECA as delegates departed. All delegates were asked to include their initials and year of birth on their completed surveys, so that pre- and post-Conference responses could be matched.

ECA transferred all matched, Pre- and Post-Conference surveys into Microsoft Excel documents following the three Conferences. Survey data was then cleaned, matched and analysed by the evaluation team. In total, 113 pre-Conference surveys and 99 post-Conference surveys were completed. After data was cleaned, a total of 82 matched and completed surveys with before and after data were collected. This sample size was deemed sufficient. A paired two sample T-test was conducted to test for statistical significance in matched survey scores.

Service leaders who attended the Sydney, Albury and Ballina HEAP Conferences were also invited to take part in in-depth qualitative telephone interviews. Interviews were conducted three to four weeks following Conference attendance, and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Participants were

provided with a \$30 Coles Myer group eGift card as a reimbursement for their time. A semi-structured interview guide was developed by the evaluation team. This was used to guide discussion on what participants gained from the Conference, in addition to how this had supported them to embed *Munch & Move* in their services.

Interviews were recorded, de-identified and given to an external provider for transcription. NVivo qualitative analysis software was then used to conduct a thematic analysis. The two researchers from the evaluation team independently undertook a comparative analysis of the transcripts to classify key themes. The researchers then met and compared themes and meanings of various key transcript segments. Once each researcher's evidence and findings had been discussed, consensus was achieved on a series of primary themes and codes.

In total, 10 service leaders were interviewed from across the three Conferences. Cancellation of the final two Conferences prevented thematic saturation from being reached, although validity of the analysis was deemed sufficient. The sample included both male and female service leaders, those who reported having extensive experience with *Munch & Move* and those who reported having less program experience. The sample also included centre-based service leaders and FDC service providers.

The study was approved by the South Western Sydney Local Health District Human Research Ethics Committee, project number 2019/STE18325.

Results

Quantitative Survey Results:

82 matched before and after scores were statistically analysed for the following, scaled statements:

- *Service Management*: I am confident using a range of leadership strategies to ensure that the *Munch & Move* program key messages are consistently implemented by educators in their work practice.
- *Conversations with Families*: I have the knowledge and skills to build the confidence of educators to have conversations with families about sensitive program topics.
- *Programming with Play*: I am confident sharing ideas and strategies with colleagues at my service to provide age-appropriate physical activity experiences, including teaching the fundamental movement skills daily.
- *Munch & Move Supports – Access to Local Support*: I understand how to access and use the local support that is available to help our service implement *Munch & Move*.
- *Munch & Move Supports – Resources*: I understand how to access and use the *Munch & Move* resources available for supporting program implementation.

Table 1a: Guest Speaker Session – Mean Survey Score Comparison

Conference	<u>Service Management</u>		P-Value	<u>Conversations with Families</u>		P-value	<u>Programming with Play</u>		P-Value
	Before Conference	After Conference		Before Conference	After Conference		Before Conference	After Conference	
Albury	3.67	4.5	0.000325	3.75	4.5	0.001342	3.75	4.5	0.000336
Ballina	3.85	4.55	0.001063	3.70	4.59	0.000107183	4.18	4.37	0.466487
Sydney	3.93	4.41	0.009483	3.66	4.48	1.42463E-06	4.15	4.48	0.058995
Overall mean score	3.81	4.49	2.39381E-08	3.707317	4.52439	1.59515E-11	4.02439	4.45122	0.000571

Table 1b: LHD Munch & Move Supports Session – Mean Survey Score Comparison

Conference	<u>Munch & Move Supports - Access to Local support</u>		P-Value	<u>Munch & Move Supports - Resources</u>		P-Value
	Before Conference	After Conference		Before Conference	After Conference	
Albury	3.42	4.46	0.00023	3.46	4.54	5.38515E-05
Ballina	3.77	4.52	0.004228	3.96	4.62	0.016301
Sydney	3.56	4.52	1.43072E-05	3.59	4.48	2.08771E-05
Overall mean score	3.59	4.5	3.31465E-10	3.67	4.54	8.45152E-10

** P -Value of 0.05 and below indicates statistical significance

The survey results show increases in all pre-to-post measures in relation to confidence, knowledge and skills.

Overall, statistically significant change was recorded for delegates' confidence in 'sharing ideas and strategies with colleagues at [their] service to provide age-appropriate physical activity experiences, including teaching the fundamental movement skills daily'. Statistically significant increases were also recorded for Albury and Ballina Conference delegates' confidence incorporating *Munch & Move* into service management practices, in addition to knowledge and skills for having difficult conversations with families.

Responses for the following multiple-choice questions were also collated from all completed pre- and post-Conference surveys:

- *Sharing Information*
 - Pre-Conference: How do you share healthy eating and active play information with staff and families at your service? (select all that apply)
 - Post-Conference: Having attended the Conference, how do you plan to share healthy eating and active play information with staff and families at your service? (select all that apply)
- *Strategies*
 - Pre-Conference: What strategies do you use at your service to support implementation of *Munch & Move*? (select all that apply)
 - Post-Conference: Having attended the Conference, what strategies do you plan to use at your service to support implementation of *Munch & Move*? (select all that apply)

Table 2: Pre- and Post-Conference Surveys – Multiple Choice Responses

Response	Before Conference				After Conference			
	Albury	Ballina	Sydney	Total (N=113)	Albury	Ballina	Sydney	Total (N=99)
<i>Sharing Information</i>								
Discussions with staff (e.g. staff meeting, in service presentations, etc.)	31	37	33	101 (89%)	31	32	35	98 (99%)
Conversations with families	26	35	30	91 (81%)	26	27	29	82 (83%)
Emails or newsletters to families	26	34	33	93 (82%)	21	24	29	74 (75%)
I will not share this information in my service	0	0	0	0 (0%)	0	0	0	0 (0%)

Response	Before Conference				After Conference			
	Albury	Ballina	Sydney	Total (N=113)	Albury	Ballina	Sydney	Total (N=99)
Other (please specify)	0	0	0	0 (0%)	3	1	7	11 (11%)
<i>Strategies</i>								
<i>Munch & Move</i> reporting and monitoring processes (e.g. document in Quality Improvement Plan, action plan, discuss at staff meetings)	18	22	24	64 (57%)	26	28	30	84 (85%)
Review programming with educators to identify where provision of physical activity experiences (including Fundamental Movement Skills) could be enhanced	22	29	27	78 (69%)	28	30	18	76 (77%)
<i>Munch & Move</i> orientation and training processes for new and existing staff	7	11	14	32 (28%)	27	27	28	82 (83%)
Identify additional ways of sharing <i>Munch & Move</i> information with families	11	24	24	59 (52%)	23	23	26	72 (73%)
Incorporate <i>Munch & Move</i> into service policies, procedures or guidelines	20	26	19	65 (58%)	22	17	31	70 (71%)
I will not use any strategies	0	0	0	0 (0%)	0	0	1	1 (1%)
Other (please specify)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	2	2	6 (6%)

Delegates were also given the opportunity to add qualitative 'Other' responses for the above multiple-choice questions. While no 'Other' responses were given in the completed pre-Conference surveys, a number were provided in the completed post-Conference surveys:

- *Sharing Information* – 11 'Other' post-Conference responses. Key response themes:
 - Sharing information through Facebook and other online channels (i.e. ECEC reporting apps).
 - Setting up posters and visual displays throughout the service, including in the foyer.

- *Strategies* – 6 ‘Other’ post-Conference responses. Key response themes:
 - o Discussing implementation with the service director and other team members, including adding *Munch & Move* as a standing team meeting agenda item.
 - o Identifying a *Munch & Move* champion to help maintain enthusiasm for program implementation.

Qualitative Interview Results:

Table 3: Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Interviews

Theme	Insights
<i>Reflection and Critical Thinking</i>	<p>The Conference was a great opportunity for service leaders to reflect on how <i>Munch & Move</i> had and had not been implemented well in their service. Participants expressed that this critical reflection started at the Conference, but continued with fellow staff and educators over the coming weeks.</p> <p>The Conference also allowed participants to share ideas, strategies and perspectives with leaders from other services. This provided further opportunities for collaborative critical reflection and planning, both during and following the Conference.</p> <p>These opportunities for reflection allowed both experienced <i>Munch & Move</i> practitioners and those with limited program knowledge to critically analyse, question and improve their services’ healthy lifestyle practices.</p>
<i>Inspiration, Conversations and Confidence</i>	<p>The Conference provided inspiration and prompted conversations between colleagues on how they could better implement <i>Munch & Move</i>. New ideas were gained from the Conference speakers and through networking with other service leaders.</p> <p>Following the Conference, participants were more confident to take leadership in the implementation of <i>Munch & Move</i>. This has allowed them to share their enhanced knowledge and skills with educators in their services, allowing for inclusive and collaborative program implementation.</p> <p>Healthy lifestyle ideas and strategies that had recently been discontinued due to other service priorities were re-ignited for some participants.</p>
<i>Adaptive Implementation</i>	<p>The Conference provided knowledge on how to adapt the <i>Munch & Move</i> program and tailor implementation to individual service needs. Brainstorming individualised approaches to implementation, rather than using a blanket, one-size-fits all approach, has helped participants to successfully embed healthy eating and physical activity into routine service delivery and communications.</p> <p>Specifically, the Conference supported leaders to analyse how the following could be accounted for in ensuring successful implementation in their services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geographical location, size and spread of service/s - Educators’ experience, interests and values - Potential funding or accessibility barriers - Children’s additional needs

	<p>- Families’ cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds</p> <p>This diversity across participants’ services highlights the importance of promoting tailored programming and implementation during the Conference.</p> <p>Following the Conference, multiple services are also embedding <i>Munch & Move</i> principles and practices in their Quality Improvement Plans.</p>
<p><i>Communication and Collaborative Decision Making</i></p>	<p>The Conference enhanced participants’ knowledge and skills in using multiple modalities for sharing healthy lifestyle information with families. These have included social media pages, newsletters, orientation packs, day books and <i>Munch & Move</i> walls.</p> <p>In addition, the Conference provided participants with strategies for effectively and respectfully approaching difficult situations and conversations with families. This has elicited a renewed focus on understanding and acknowledging the needs and values of individual families.</p> <p>Applying these skills when discussing issues like lunchbox contents and children’s birthday cakes has facilitated genuine, collaborative relationships, and families have expressed gratitude at being included in decision-making processes.</p>
<p><i>Drivers and Champions</i></p>	<p>The Conference highlighted the importance of having <i>Munch & Move</i> ‘drivers’ or ‘champions’ in services. Participants have assigned these roles to staff who are passionate about healthy lifestyles and have the capacity to ‘ignite interest and commitment’ in others.</p> <p>Participants have empowered champions to motivate and encourage others to effectively embed the program throughout service operations. Service leaders have also personally driven this by encouraging educators to complete the <i>Munch & Move</i> program training, assisting room leaders with their programming, ensuring <i>Munch & Move</i> is a standing agenda item, and making sure information from the Conference is circulated throughout their service.</p> <p>Assigning champions often works best when specific aspects of <i>Munch & Move</i> are divided between staff, allowing for a more collaborative advocacy approach. For example, participants have assigned the role of ‘<i>Move</i> champion’ to educators who are passionate about physical activity.</p>
<p><i>Strengthening Move implementation</i></p>	<p>The Conference facilitated a renewed focus on physical activity for service leaders. In particular, leaders have worked with educators to incorporate intentional Fundamental Movement Skill (FMS) learning experiences into their daily programming.</p> <p>A key aspect of this work has been to support and encourage educators to get actively involved in these learning experiences, with an aim of increasing their confidence to demonstrate FMS and other physical activities.</p> <p>Moreover, the Conference highlighted the breadth of program resources available to support FMS and physical activity, in addition to strengthening knowledge on how resources could be used in ways that met services’ spatial, environmental and cultural needs. As a result, participants have</p>

	ordered more resources for their service, and have worked with educators and champions to ensure they are readily accessible and frequently used.
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Discussion

The findings in this report demonstrate that service leaders attending the 2020 *Munch & Move* HEAP Conferences gained a number of beneficial learnings and outcomes. Quantitative survey results show increases in all pre-to-post measures; demonstrating improved overall confidence, knowledge and skills for implementing *Munch & Move*. These results also indicate that attendees strengthened their capacity to access ongoing program support and resources from LHDs.

Overall, statistically significant change was only recorded for delegates' confidence to facilitate daily, best practice physical activity and fundamental movement skill learning experiences. However, statistically significant increases were recorded for Albury and Ballina Conference delegates' confidence incorporating *Munch & Move* into service management and leadership practices, as well as knowledge and skills for effectively engaging families on challenging healthy lifestyle topics.

It should also be noted that the Conferences target ECEC leaders from services already participating in *Munch & Move*. This means that most Conference delegates were likely already experienced with *Munch & Move* implementation, and that mean pre-Conference survey scores were already high relative to ECEC leaders with limited or no program experience.

The multiple-choice survey questions also show that the Conferences helped service leaders to consider a variety of strategies for enhancing program implementation. The response rate for all 'Strategies' options increased from pre- to post-Conference, with especially notable increases for enhancing *Munch & Move* reporting and monitoring, integrating *Munch & Move* into service orientation processes, and identifying new ways to engage families. The response rate for incorporating *Munch & Move* into service policies, procedures and guidelines also increased by 13 per cent, which is encouraging given the comparatively low achievement of policy-related program practices. As of 30 September 2020, Population Health Intervention Management System data show that policy-related practices are achieved at an average rate of 54 per cent in centre-based services and 47 per cent for FDC service providers across NSW, compared with average achievement rates of 78 per cent (centre-based) and 71 per cent (FDC) for all other practices.

Pre-to-post response rates for all but one 'Sharing information' strategies increased, although high pre-Conference rates for these options meant that there was less scope for growth. Although there was a decrease in response rate for the engagement strategy of sending emails and newsletters to families, it is possible this is related to the concurrent increase in participant's confidence in facilitating more direct, face-to-face conversations with parents and carers. Qualitative response themes from both this question and the in-depth interviews also indicate that Conference attendance has resulted in increasingly innovative ways of communicating with families, such as social media and ECEC reporting applications, which may also account for a decrease in reliance on emails and newsletters.

The thematic analysis of the 10 in-depth, qualitative interviews provided further insights into the nature of delegates' increased knowledge, skills and confidence, in addition to their service contexts. A key aim of the Conferences is to extend beyond the *Munch & Move* program training and strengthen the ability of ECEC leaders to effectively embed the program; to incorporate healthy eating, physical activity and reduced screen time as essential characteristics of ongoing service

operations. Several barriers to this level of implementation were identified during the interviews. In particular, participants identified environmental limitations, children with additional needs, differing educator and family values and experience, and lack of funds for resources as barriers to embedding *Munch & Move*. Geographical spread of services was also identified as a unique challenge for FDC services providers.

Importantly, the thematic analysis demonstrated that the Conferences provided knowledge and skills that can address these barriers. The key interview themes of reflective practice and adaptive implementation indicate delegates' enhanced ability to critically evaluate and tailor program implementation to meet the unique environmental, financial, access and socio-cultural needs of their service, staff, children and families. This, in combination with the physical activity focus of the *Programming with Play* session, has helped services to embed fundamental movement skills and *Munch & Move* resources in innovative and contextually appropriate ways.

The ability to network and share insights with other service leaders during the Conferences has resulted more effective communication and shared decision making, both among staff and between services and families. This has helped foster a flexible and collaborative environment for healthy eating and active play, which has been especially helpful for delegates during potentially sensitive conversations with families. The thematic analysis also demonstrates the Conferences inspire service leaders to regain or intensify their focus on *Munch & Move*, while providing them with ideas and strategies for motivating staff to unite and champion program implementation. This is a critical outcome in a sector with many competing priorities and regulatory requirements, particularly in the wake of COVID-19.

In summary, this mixed methods evaluation demonstrates that the 2020 *Munch & Move* HEAP Conferences provided significant value for ECEC sector leaders. The Conferences allowed delegates to develop and strengthen high-level skills and knowledge that support best practice, whole-of-service *Munch & Move* implementation, while also addressing a range of contextual barriers and needs. The fact that these outcomes are leading to genuine embedding of healthy eating and active play across a range of metropolitan and regional ECEC service types implies that the Conferences will have a long-term, positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the young children in these settings.

Virtual Conference Evaluation

In place of the two cancelled 2020 HEAP Conferences, two virtual HEAP Conferences will be delivered in 2021. The online Conferences will contain the same professional development content and will be delivered through the Zoom platform.

It is recommended that these two Conferences are evaluated using the same methodology outlined in this report. This will allow for an outcome and impact comparison between the virtual and face-to-face Conferences.

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