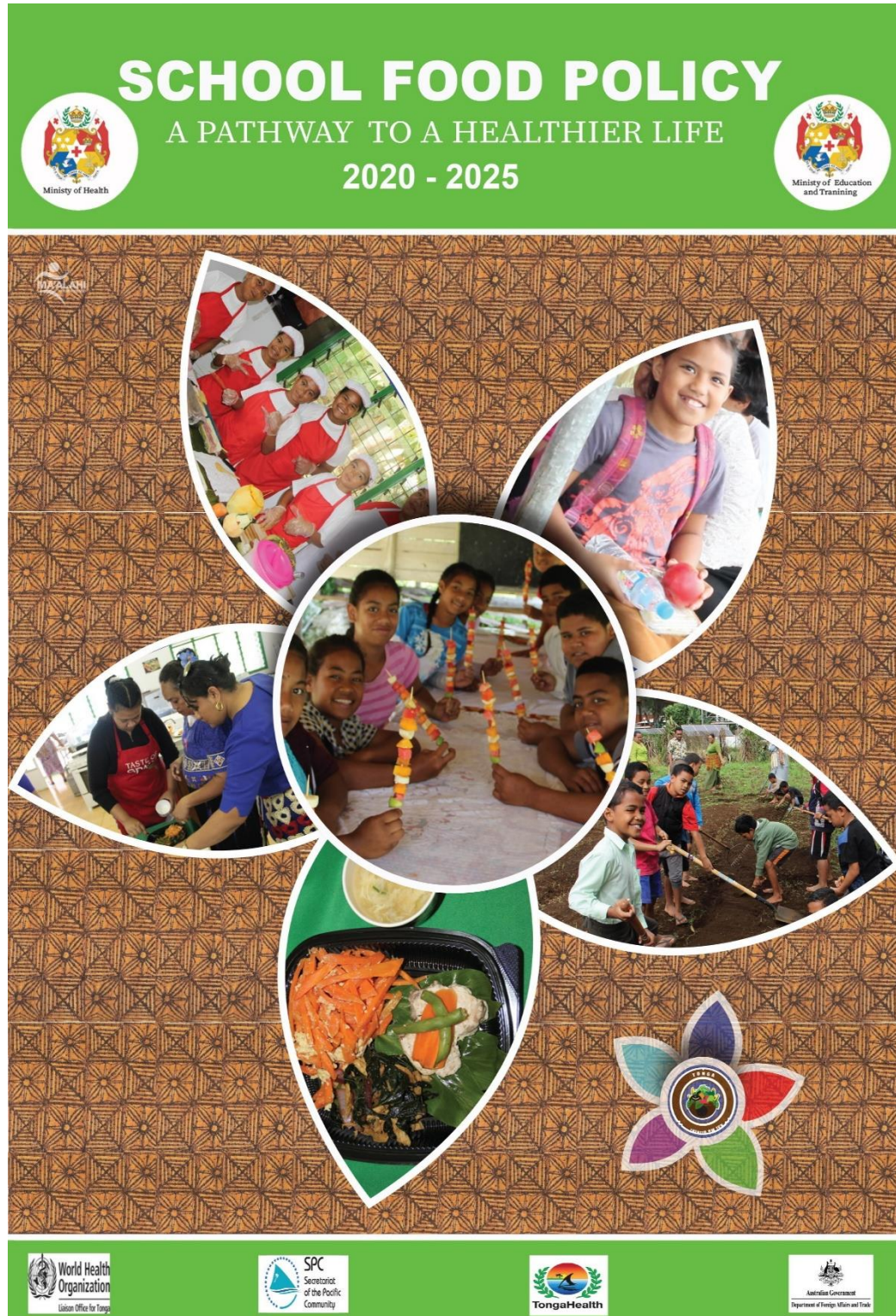


### 3.3: SCHOOL FOOD POLICY



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Ministry of Education and Training  
Ministry of Health  
Tonga



*Healthy Children, Healthier Nation*

**Designed and written by:** Ms 'Ilisa Topui, Ms Lute Po'uhila & Mr Lopeti Piutau  
Health Promotion Unit, Ministry of Health, Tonga

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**Technical support for the review and development of the revised School Food Policy was provided by:**

1. Dr Wendy Snowdon - *Team Coordinator, Pacific NCDs & Health through the Life-course, World Health Organization Division of Pacific Technical Support, Suva, Fiji*
2. Mr. Ponapate Taunisila - *Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Secondary Schools/ER Unit, Ministry of Education and Training, Tonga*

**For more information contact:**

3. Dr Reynold 'Ofanoa - *Chief Medical Officer, Public Health Division, Ministry of Health, Tonga*
  4. Ms 'Elisiva Na'ati - *NCD Adviser, Public Health Nutrition Division, Pacific Community*
  5. Dr Viliami Puloka - *Senior Health Promotion Strategist, Health Promotion Forum of New Zealand, NZ*
  6. Dr 'Ofa Tukia - *Medical Officer In-Charge NCD-Health Promotion Unit, Tonga*
- Email: o.tukia@gmail.com  
Phone: 23200 ext 1319



# **School Food Policy**

**2020 – 2025**

## **A Pathway to a Healthier Life**

**The review of the School Food Policy was a collaborative effort among:**

Tonga Ministry of Health

Tonga Ministry of Education and Training

Tonga Health Promotion Foundation

World Health Organization Country Liaison Office, Tonga

University of Otago, Wellington, New Zealand

**The School Food Policy 2020-25 was officially launched on Tuesday,**

**12<sup>th</sup> November 2019 by Honourable Siaosi Sovaleni, the Minister of Education and Training, and  
also the Acting Minister of Health.**

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Honourable Siaosi Sovaleni

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## 1. Preface

The global burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is significantly affecting the socioeconomic development of both developed and developing nations, including Tonga. There is very strong evidence that obesity and overweight are linked to NCDs.

In Tonga, overweight and obesity are prevalent and they are preventable risk factors of NCDs. The 2014 STEPS survey suggests that 90.7% of Tongan adults were overweight and a further 67.6% obese, with 73% consuming less than five servings of fruit and vegetables a day. The Global School-based Student Health Survey suggests these risk factors are present in children as well. Of 13-17 years olds in Tonga in 2017, 57.7% were overweight and 24.6% obese, with 60.4% usually drank carbonated soft drinks one or more times per day.

Childhood obesity poses a critical threat to the health and wellbeing of young children and adolescence. This problem is underpinned by significant changes in the diet in Tonga in recent decades with rising levels of fats, oils and refined sugars prominent within the diet. It is attributable to the unhealthy eating practises and physical inactivity of school-aged children. The School Food Policy initiative was prompted as a means of addressing these health risks faced by young children.

The School Food Policy is an essential guideline for improving the diets of school children. This policy provides a framework for ensuring that the physical health and wellbeing of school children are well looked after. This is consistent with the recent WHO Implementation Plan on Ending Childhood Obesity.

A key element of the National Strategy for the Control and Prevention of NCDs is the Tonga School Food Policy which came into force in 2007 and was updated in 2012. In 2017, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Training, Tonga Health Promotion Foundation, World Health Organization Country Liaison Office Tonga, and the University of Otago in New Zealand, reviewed and developed the new Tonga School Food Policy 2020-25: *A Pathway to a Healthier Life*.

### 1. Policy Rationale

The National Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Committee recognizes the important connection between a healthy diet and a student's ability to learn effectively. As such, the National NCD Committee considered the Ministry of Education and Training and the school providers roles in monitoring and ensuring that the foods made available to students at school are healthy and nutritious.

In 2004, the Ministry of Health conducted a *Nutrition Risk Factors for NCD's Survey* on school children between the ages of 12 – 15 years. The results of the survey found that 13% of students brought lunch from home, 12% purchased food at a nearby shop, and 75% purchased food from the school canteen or food stall. It was also evident that the majority of food and drinks available at the school contained high levels of sugar and/or fat with little nutritional value. For example, most students eating at home or bringing food from home consumed bread and butter or a sandwich, while the most frequently purchased foods from local shops and canteens were bread and butter, buns, uncooked noodles, fried cakes, soda pop, and ice blocks. This survey inspired the initial 2005 draft of the School Food Policy. The *Pacific Obesity Prevention in Communities Project* baseline assessment

conducted in 2005 – 06 found that over 70% of Tongan adolescents aged 12—18 years, ate morning tea and approximately 68.5% ate lunch at the school canteen.

The 2010 *Global School Student-based Health Survey* conducted by the Ministry of Health indicated that only 38.7% of students had the recommended 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Approximately 56.3% of students consumed carbonated sugar sweetened beverages at least once a week. The Ministry of Education and Training conducted a *School Breakfast Survey* among government primary schools in 2011 and found that 28% of students came to school without breakfast. And of the students who did have breakfast, 75% consumed unhealthy foods such as fried cakes and uncooked noodles.

From these surveys it is evident diets are not meeting national dietary guidelines. According to the surveys, the meals consumed during school hours are not balanced and high in sodium, sugar, and/or fat. Additionally, among the adolescent students surveyed, most foods consumed during school hours were purchased from the school canteen. These results merit intervention focused on trying to make the school food environment healthier for our students.

A model programme that provides evidence of the potential positive outcomes of collaborative projects between the Ministries of Health and Education is the Malimali Project through the Department of Dentistry. Results of this programme indicated that within 3 years of implementating a dental care and check up programme, the number of dental carries was significantly reduced by 70%.

## **2. Mission**

- 1.1 To improve the health and wellbeing of students by regulating the type of foods made available and consumed within school grounds so as to establish and maintain life-long healthy eating habits.
- 1.2 To secure the on-going support of school providers and parents in ensuring that healthy eating is encouraged within the school grounds and the students have access to healthy foods so as to develop healthy eating habits.

## **3. Goals**

- 3.1. 3.1 Ensure that only healthy and nutritious foods are made available to students within the school compound.
- 3.2. Ensure that foods that are brought to or sold within the school compound are sold at reasonable prices and in reasonable portions.
- 3.3. Regulate and confine the types of food brought by students to school. These foods shall be restricted to healthy and nutritious foods. *Please refer to paragraph 4.4*
- 3.4. Ensure that the school supervises the types of food brought onto school grounds through the implementation and enforcement of the School Food Policy.
- 3.5. Gather parental support in terms of implementing this food policy by advocating it in the PTA meetings and informing parents through notices and newsletters.
- 3.6. Regulate and promote the planting of fruit and vegetables gardens in the school compound.

#### **4. Strategies**

- 4.1. The operators of the school canteen or stall shall only be permitted to commence and continue business on the school grounds on the condition that the criteria listed in the agreement between the Principal and the canteen/ vendor are met and the agreement is signed. *Please see Appendix A for an example of a standard agreement.*
- 4.2. The schools should not permit a canteen or stall operator to commence business on the school premise unless they hold a valid Health Certificate pursuant to the Hygiene Act of 2002, and adhere to the School Food Policy.
- 4.3. The operators of school canteen or stall shall not be permitted to sell the following products onto school grounds:

##### **Foods high in fat, sugar and/or salt**

- chips or related snack foods
  - biscuits
  - sweets or candy/ lollies, Chinese lollies
  - chocolate
  - deep fried food
  - fried cakes
  - chocolate cakes
  - Instant Noodles
  - Meat Pies/ sausage or hot dog rolls
  - Sugar added or fizzy drinks including cordials and tangs
  - Ice blocks or ice creams.
- 4.4. The following is a guide to the food operators of the types of food that should be sold to students within the school compound:
    - Foods low in fat, sugar and or salt
    - vegetables & fresh salads
    - fresh fruits & fruit salad
    - coconut juice
    - bottled pure water/ empty bottle for water filling at school
    - shushi
    - roti
    - fish cakes
    - meat & vegetable dishes
    - steamed dumplings
    - sandwiches (with nutritious fillings)



- filled rolls (with nutritious fillings)
- Hamburgers (with nutritious fillings)
- Grilled chicken pieces
- baked foods like banana/carrot/pumpkin cakes
- manioke tama
- toókutu
- Tongan staple foods (meákai Tonga)

*\* Please note that any foods not listed shall be under the discretion of the school's principal.*

- 4.5. Food functions and special occasions held on the school compound shall be under the discretion of the school principal.
- 4.6. The school shall monitor the operation of the school canteen or food functions within the school compound to ensure that it does not sell the prohibited food as outlined in paragraph.
- 4.7. Negotiate with the operators of the school canteen and stalls to ensure that all food products are sold at reasonable prices and portion size so that it is generally affordable to all students. Foods should be limited to a maximum price of 1 pa'anga.
- 4.8. Incorporate into the School Rules and Regulations the types of food that children are not permitted to bring onto school grounds as outlined in paragraph 4.3 Please refer to Appendix C for a list of suggested positive reinforcement strategies.
- 4.9 Regulate the drinking of water or fresh coconut juice only on school grounds. This can be imposed by incorporating a provision in the School Rules and Regulations prohibiting students from bringing any soft drinks or sugar-sweetened beverages to school.
- 4.10 Ensure that there is sufficient clean drinking water within the school compound so that all students can easily access drinking water if they do not bring drinking water from home.
- 4.11 Monitoring and supervision of the types of foods consumed by students on school grounds are under the discretion of the principal. *Please refer to Appendix D for a list of suggested enforcement strategies.*
- 4.12 Submit this food policy to the PTA to raise and discuss in their meetings so as to gather their support and assistance in implementing the policy. It is essential that parents understand and accept the adoption of this School Food Policy in order for it to be successfully implemented.
- 4.13 Advise parents, through a newsletter, of the rationale for implementing the School Food Policy, and the need for their support and assistance on this matter as it is for the health interest and wellbeing of their children.
- 4.14 Include monitoring of the School Food Policy in the Principal Appraisal Form. The Deputy Director of the Schools Division will share a report with the Ministry of Health through the Health Promoting

School Steering Committee, and to the quarterly basis.

National NCD Committee through Tonga Health on a

## 5. Expected Benefits

The adoption and effective implementation of this food policy should yield the following benefits in the future.

- 5.1. The healthy eating habits amongst school children will significantly reduce the risk of them being overweight and obese. This will in effect reduce the risk of school children developing NCDs such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, which have become more common in young children.
- 5.2. School children will develop healthy and nutritional eating habits even when they are not on school grounds, which should consequently influence the eating habits of their friends and family outside of school.
- 5.3. The healthy diet imposed on school children should effectively increase their ability to learn effectively and achieve goals.
- 5.4. The healthy eating habits instilled in school children will not only improve their health and well being general, but also enable them to develop life-long healthy eating habits at a young age. This is an important step to ensuring that Tonga has a healthier population in the future

