Foreword

In the face of research showing that obesity rates are highest in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage, there is a particular need for educational initiatives to improve the capacity of targeted populations to buy and prepare healthy food, and for financial incentives to increase the uptake of healthy food and physical activity.

This has been the work of the Social Inclusion Implementation Group in 2014-16, focusing on better nutrition and physical health as part of the ACT Government’s broader social inclusion and equality agenda, so the healthy choice becomes the easy choice.

The Social Inclusion Implementation Group concentrated its work with multicultural communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young people in the youth justice system, Housing ACT tenants and specific sectors within those populations, such as women and young parents.

The Implementation Group has been the responsibility of the Community Services Directorate (CSD) and its work over the past two years has been supported by $85,000 community programs funding from the ACT Government. Many of the Group’s activities were managed by the Community Participation Group and the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre, within CSD. Our thanks go to all the staff involved who helped make the Group’s work such a success.

A key feature of the Implementation Group’s work has been the way it has partnered with other directorates and with community organisations. This echoes findings from the overarching Healthy Weight Initiative evaluation, about the value of collaboration and significant co-benefits of working in a whole of government partnership, which is critical to the success of the initiative.

We hope you enjoy the following report of the Social Inclusion Implementation Group’s work in 2014-16 and its activities, achievements and lessons learnt.

Yvette Berry MLA
Minister for Community Services

Meegan Fitzharris MLA
Assistant Health Minister
Activities and achievements

*The cooking skills program* included a series of classes by Nutrition Australia for the Chinese, African, Pacific Islander and Persian/Hazara communities in 2014-15. Participants indicated they had learnt more about healthy foods, made some friends and felt more connected to their community. One respondent said that the course had inspired her not only to eat more healthy foods, but also to enjoy the process of cooking.

Nutrition Australia also ran a train the trainer program for staff at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre.

Three rounds of the *Muslim and South Asian Women’s Swimming Program* were held in 2015-16 at Kings Pool in Deakin. The program included subsidised learn-to-swim and aqua aerobics sessions and importantly, the training of four women from the Muslim community as swimming and first aid instructors. From small beginnings the program eventually secured over 100 participants, with a regular weekly attendance of more than 60 participants.

Feedback was very positive, with comments such as ‘my knees have stopped hurting,’ ‘it has helped me with my arthritis’ and ‘it works out all my limbs.’ One participant, aged in her 60s, said she had lost three kilos, met people from her community and gained water confidence and flexibility.

The *Translation project* involved the development and translation of a healthy eating fact sheet, focusing on healthy eating and lifestyles, into eleven community languages (Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Persian, Samoan, Serbian, Spanish and Vietnamese). Copies have been printed for distribution and made available with the English language version on the Healthy Living website.

Educational sessions on healthy eating and fitness activities were delivered in 2015-16 in 15 community language schools for over 200 students. Sessions included nutritional information, a cooking demonstration and a fitness activity.

Two rounds of a holistic program called *Freshen it up* were conducted in 2015-16 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and young parents of the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre. The program was designed by staff and parents and focused on healthy eating, goal setting, emotional wellbeing and physical fitness.

Activities included tours of the Belconnen Markets with a nutritionist, cooking demonstrations for adults and kids, life coaching, a relaxation workshop, a visit to Greening Australia and swimming lessons for parents and children.

Feedback from the program was very positive, with participants reporting increased confidence to try out new recipes and encourage healthy eating for their children, as well as the chance to make new friends. One young parent commented, ‘I walked out on cloud nine. I feel much safer talking about my issues in the group.’ Another parent stated, ‘I always see these ingredients and I never know how to use them. A course like this helps you find out there’s so much more you can do.’

An exercise program called *Move it*, involving the provision of low cost gym sessions, was undertaken for women attending multicultural and Muslim playgroups from Tuggeranong and Gungahlin Child and Family Centres.

The program included nutrition education on healthy eating. Participants reported enjoying the programs and feeling more motivated to make positive changes towards greater physical activity and healthier eating practices.
Learnings

A number of lessons have been learned during the work of the Social Inclusion Implementation Group, particularly the importance of building sustainability, collaborating with partners and taking a community development approach.

**Sustainability** – the third round of the Muslim and South Asian Women’s Swimming Program included training four selected community leaders as swimming and first aid instructors. This measure is designed to build capacity within the community, to enable swimming programs to continue into the future.

Due to the interest generated within the community over the program’s first three (subsidised) rounds, the program was able to become fully self-sustaining, so the fourth round was organised entirely by the Royal Life Saving Society and the Muslim women’s community, paid for by participants’ fees. There have also been requests from within the community for a future men’s swimming program and classes in Pilates, belly dancing and dance.

These developments suggest that the healthy weight messages of nutrition and physical activity are becoming more organically embedded into this particular community.

**Collaboration** – many of the projects depended on partnerships with other directorates and with community groups, including for discounts and in-kind support. Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) provided the Flexible Bus Service for Freshen it up, additional funding enabled the cooking class at Bimberi, and CSD collaborated with the Justice and Community Safety Directorate (JACS) on the High Density Housing Safety and Community Project which enabled Reclink to provide a men’s exercise program for ACT Housing tenants near Ainslie Avenue.

To deliver the Freshen it up program, partnerships were established with ACT Health, Rock Development Group, Belconnen Fresh Food Markets, Pallotella, Kings Swim School, Belconnen Community Service, Strathnairn Arts Association, Greening Australia and Southern Cross Early Childhood School.

Collaboration has yielded some unexpected, positive outcomes. For example, the partnership with Strathnairn led to the establishment of a regular men’s arts group, sponsored by the Riverview Group. Another organisation has offered to return to the Young Parents group next year and facilitate sessions free of charge.

**A community development approach** has included principles such as:
- co-design, involving the community from the ground up
- using strengths-based approaches that build capacity, and
- being sensitive to linguistic and cultural diversity.

The Social Inclusion Implementation Group worked with community leaders to garner support from their communities and to co-design programs.

These community representatives helped us to ensure that messages were communicated in an inclusive way, and that project planning and implementation proceeded at a pace appropriate for the linguistic and cultural context. This has required sensitive and diplomatic consultation and communication with the communities involved.

It has been important to be flexible in delivering programs, to suit changing circumstances; for example, having a female coordinator for the swimming and Move it programs; and respecting communities’ requests for low key media reporting or publicity of the program.

Media & ministerial attendance

Achievements and highlights of the Implementation Group’s projects were communicated to the ACT community and the ACTPS through the Our Canberra newsletter and the Healthy Happenings newsletters.

A video of a cooking demonstration that took place as part of the Freshen it up program was developed. The video was made available on the Belconnen Markets and Healthy Living websites.

The Minister for Community Services Yvette Berry MLA enjoyed visits to a number of projects, including the swimming program and the Freshen it up project, where she participated in cooking, yoga and yarning time (storytelling) sessions and chatted with participants over lunch.

**More information**