

An intervention to facilitate the implementation of healthy eating and physical activity policies and practices in childcare services

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Aim: Implementing initiatives promoting healthy eating and physical activity in childcare settings has been identified as a priority to prevent excessive child weight gain. Despite this, few trials have been conducted to assess the effectiveness of interventions to support population-wide implementation of such initiatives. The aim of this study is to describe a multi-component intervention to increase the implementation of healthy eating and physical activity policies and practices by childcare services.

Methods: This study was conducted in random sample of 128 childcare services in the Hunter Region of NSW. Sixty-four services were randomly allocated to a 12-month implementation intervention. The intervention consisted of a number of strategies to facilitate childcare service implementation of healthy eating and physical activity policies and practices. Intervention strategies included securing executive support, consensus processes, provision of staff training, academic detailing visits, tools and resources, implementation support staff, performance monitoring and feedback, and a communications strategy. To assess the effectiveness of the intervention, telephone surveys with Nominated Supervisors and Room Leaders of childcare services will be conducted at baseline and post-intervention.

Results: All services received support to implement the intervention through a dedicated implementation support staff member. Eighty percent of services in the intervention group received a series of three staff training sessions and at least two academic detailing visits. All services received performance feedback at six intervals throughout the intervention and bi-monthly newsletters. All services also received a package of tools and resources to support and sufficiently equip childcare service staff to implement the healthy eating and physical activity policies and practices. Follow-up data for the trial outcome will be collected in June 2014. We will present the preliminary results including the extent of the delivery of the implementation intervention and the change in prevalence of services meeting all healthy eating and physical activity policies and practices, including a written nutrition policy, a written physical activity policy, implementation of nutritional standards for foods brought from home, daily fundamental movement skill programs and restriction of sedentary screen time.

Conclusions: There is a clear need for intervention studies to extend the research regarding the implementation of healthy eating and physical activity policies and practices by childcare services. This trial aims to advance the currently limited evidence in this field and will contribute important information regarding the effectiveness of intervention strategies to facilitate the population-wide implementation of healthy eating and physical activity policies and practices in childcare services.