

December 2020

To whom it may concern

**Re: FOCIS Product Registration Program closure**

This letter on behalf of the Federation of Canteens in Schools Inc. (FOCIS) is to provide an update regarding the FOCIS Product Registration Program (PRP).

As you may be aware the PRP has been assisting food industry and school canteens in the provision of healthy choices since 1998. The initial program was developed in response to demand from schools for an easy reference list of suitable food and drink products.

Since this time, State and Territory government departments have implemented healthy eating policies or guidelines; Canteen Associations and Networks have developed their own product registration programs and/or lists based on these policies or guidelines; and in 2010, the National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines were developed and currently used in a selection of jurisdictions.

This means there are different standards used across Australia. With the exception of New South Wales, all jurisdictions continue to use a Traffic light system. FOCIS recognises that this has resulted in a level of confusion for many food manufacturers, distributors and canteen operators.

In 2020, FOCIS undertook a comprehensive review of the PRP to ensure that we were still providing the best possible service to both food industry and schools. Included below is an update about the outcomes of this review.

**Survey**

A survey of canteen operators (n=62) in various States and Territories was conducted to find out more about where canteens source their goods, details about products and other information. The results showed:

- when sourcing information about food products for the canteen:
  - o the majority (85%) use state-based product registration programs and associated Buyer's Guides
  - o 26% use multiple sources
  - o 21% use companies and suppliers
  
- when purchasing pantry items for the canteen:
  - o 43% use supermarkets and suppliers
  - o 38% use distributors/wholesalers
  
- when asked general questions about purchasing behaviour and food preparation in the canteen:
  - o 64% agree it is easy to source suitable products (i.e. healthy products that meet policy or guidelines)

- 69% make *some* items from scratch onsite; 49% (n=28) make *most*
- 42% believe manufacturers/suppliers are a good source of information; 23% disagree
- 75% agree the Canteen Association/Network in their State/Territory is a good source of information
- 60% often seek information from other canteen staff about products
- on average, the majority (68%) would like more recipes; nutrition information and facts; and marketing materials for the canteen.

These results show an increase in food prepared onsite and an increased reliance on PRP's in individual States and Territories; rather than the program offered by FOCIS. They also indicate that the tools and resources providing the greatest support are not related to PRP's.

### **Changes to the PRP**

At the recent FOCIS Annual General Meeting it was determined that as of the 31 December 2020 the FOCIS PRP will cease to operate.

FOCIS has communicated the closure of the PRP to all registered companies and encouraged them to contact other organisations who operate PRP's in various States and Territories that are best placed to service their needs for this type of activity.

### **Strategic alignment**

The PRP review also included an analysis of organisational actions and planning to provide FOCIS with further clarity about our current key objectives as a public health organisation and what the future core focus should be.

Our core values, what we do and how we operate, can be defined under three main domains - advocating for healthy food, working in partnership and education.

As a peak body working with State and Territory Canteen Associations and Networks, FOCIS believes that school canteens are an integral part of the learning environment and play an important role in health promotion. FOCIS will continue to support, promote, facilitate and empower school communities, State and Territory Canteen Associations and Networks, food industry and government to enable stakeholders to make decisions that result in healthy food services.

FOCIS is incredibly optimistic about the future of the organisation. While we will continue to support school canteens and food industry and we will be dedicating more time to increasing our advocacy role. In the past 18 months FOCIS has participated in a number of activities in this space.

#### *National Allergy Strategy (NAS)*

FOCIS is an active member of the NAS reference group. We recently provided feedback on the *Minimum standards for anaphylaxis prevention and management in schools and early childhood education and care (ECEC)*; FOCIS extended an invitation for non-FOCIS members to provide feedback to ensure it was comprehensive and suited a national context. FOCIS promoted online surveys on behalf of NAS for parents and school staff (including canteen staff) and ECEC staff to further inform the strategy.

#### *National Preventative Health Strategy*

FOCIS subcommittee members reviewed the National Preventive Health Strategy consultation paper and submitted feedback. To ensure school canteens and broader school content in terms of health and wellbeing were considered.

#### *South Australian School Canteen Network (SASCN)*

FOCIS provided a letter of support to SASCN as the Network were having a difficult time forming a committee; FOCIS urged SASCN members to become involved in the committee to ensure there was a consistent and informed voice for school canteens in SA.

*Victorian School Canteen Association (VSCA)*

FOCIS supported the VSCA in winding up their organisation. Part of this included sponsoring past VSCA members in the first instance, followed by other Victorian school canteens, to complete the *School canteen online training* course free of charge.

*School canteen online training*

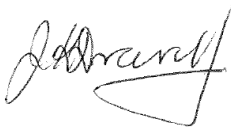
Following the training going live July 2019, Canteen Associations and Networks were invited to participate in launch events, which included access to three free training registrations to be offered as door prizes. FOCIS continues to promote the nationally applicable training to assist in upskilling canteen staff in all jurisdictions. A 30% discount on training fees was offered during most of 2020 as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to encourage continued professional development whilst many canteens were closed.

With the closure of the PRP FOCIS welcomes the opportunity to discuss a united canteen voice and strengthening partnerships with those who advocate on behalf of school canteens across Australia. We encourage you to reach out to us should we be able to assist you in any way at [admin@focis.com.au](mailto:admin@focis.com.au).

There is information about becoming a [FOCIS member](#) on the website; you will also find the date for the first meeting for 2021.

We hope you and your staff stay safe and well and have wonderful Christmas break. We look forward to working with you further in 2021.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jill Drury', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jill Drury  
FOCIS Chairperson