

COOK AND CONNECT

EMPOWERING RURAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH FOOD LITERACY IN SOUTH WEST QUEENSLAND

Higher rates of chronic disease in rural and remote areas

Associated with high rates of obesity and low vegetable intake

Further exacerbated by food insecurity and low food literacy

Increased need for preventative approach

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AFFILIATIONS

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FUNDING & ETHICAL APPROVAL

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METHODOLOGY

- Location: Roma (MM 4), SWHHS
- Participants: High school students aged 12-17 years (n=25)
- Delivery:
 - 60min sessions offered weekly across 6 weeks of the school term
 - Led by a community nutritionist, supported by teaching staff.
- Session focus:
 - Building food literacy
 - Promoting budget-conscious meal planning
 - Encouraging social connection through hands-on cooking.
- Evaluation method:
 - Questionnaire containing three questions that explored themes of confidence in cooking, recent cooking activity and peer connection.
 - Conducted verbally during class using a yarning approach

CONCLUSIONS

Findings suggest place-based cooking programs can effectively address food insecurity and promote health equity among rural youth.

- The community-led model enables
 - Adaptation across diverse settings and scalability as a sustainable solution.
- To support long-term growth, efforts will focus on building local capacity across the SWHHS region.
- Program expansion to date includes,
 - Adult community cooking classes (via Wellness My Way in partnership with Health and Wellbeing Queensland)
 - Out-of-school programs delivered in collaboration with partners to support community wellbeing and crime prevention.

By targeting key social determinants of health, such as food literacy and social connection, the program contributes to sustainable improvements in rural community wellbeing.

Any Questions? Contact Alex McKenna at Alex.McKenna@health.qld.gov.au

INTRODUCTION

- Food insecurity affects 4-14% of Australian population, up to 83% in disadvantaged areas.
 - Rural populations 33% more likely to experience.^{1,2}
- Food insecurity is a risk factor for chronic disease (Type 2 Diabetes, Cardiovascular Disease & Obesity).^{3,4}
- Food utilisation (meal planning, budgeting & cooking) is protective, promoting resilience and healthier habits.^{2,5}
- Cooking programs offer practical, community-based solutions to improve food utilisation skills.^{2,5}

COOK AND CONNECT

- **Cook and Connect** is a place-based program for high school students, co-designed with community members, supporting organisations and program facilitators.
 - It addresses social determinants of health by:
 - Building food literacy and practical skills
 - Boosting confidence and supporting long-term health.

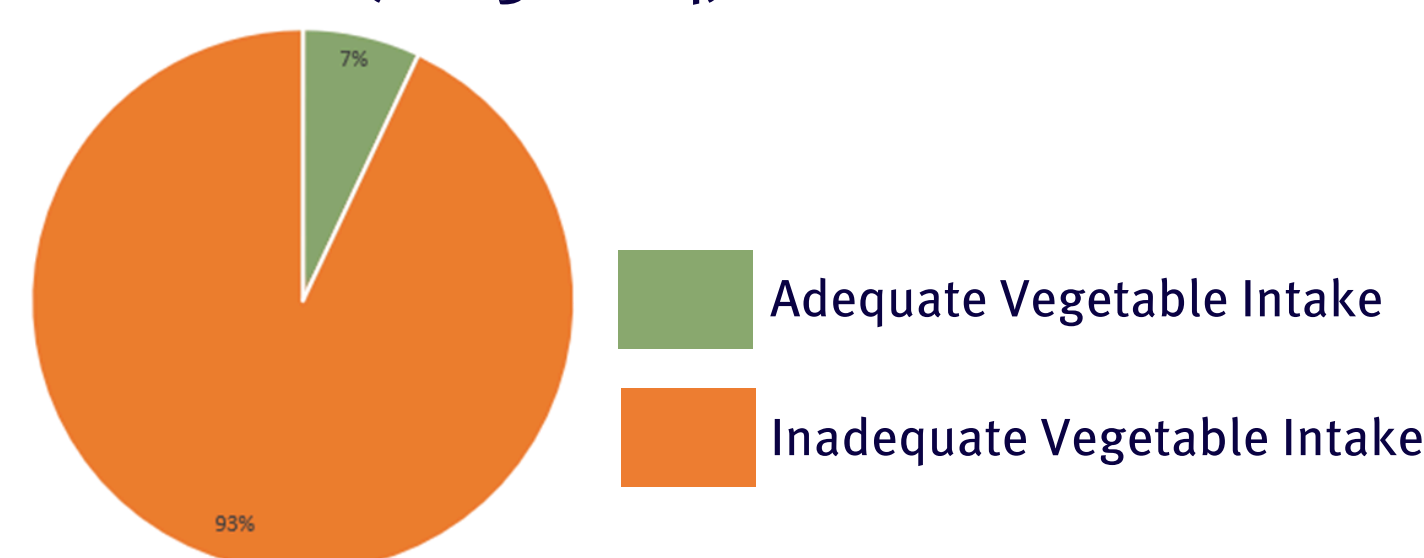


AIM

To collect preliminary data on the **Cook and Connect** program impact and outcomes to help inform program expansion throughout South West Hospital and Health Service (SWHHS).

SWHHS Vegetable Intake

(2023-2024)

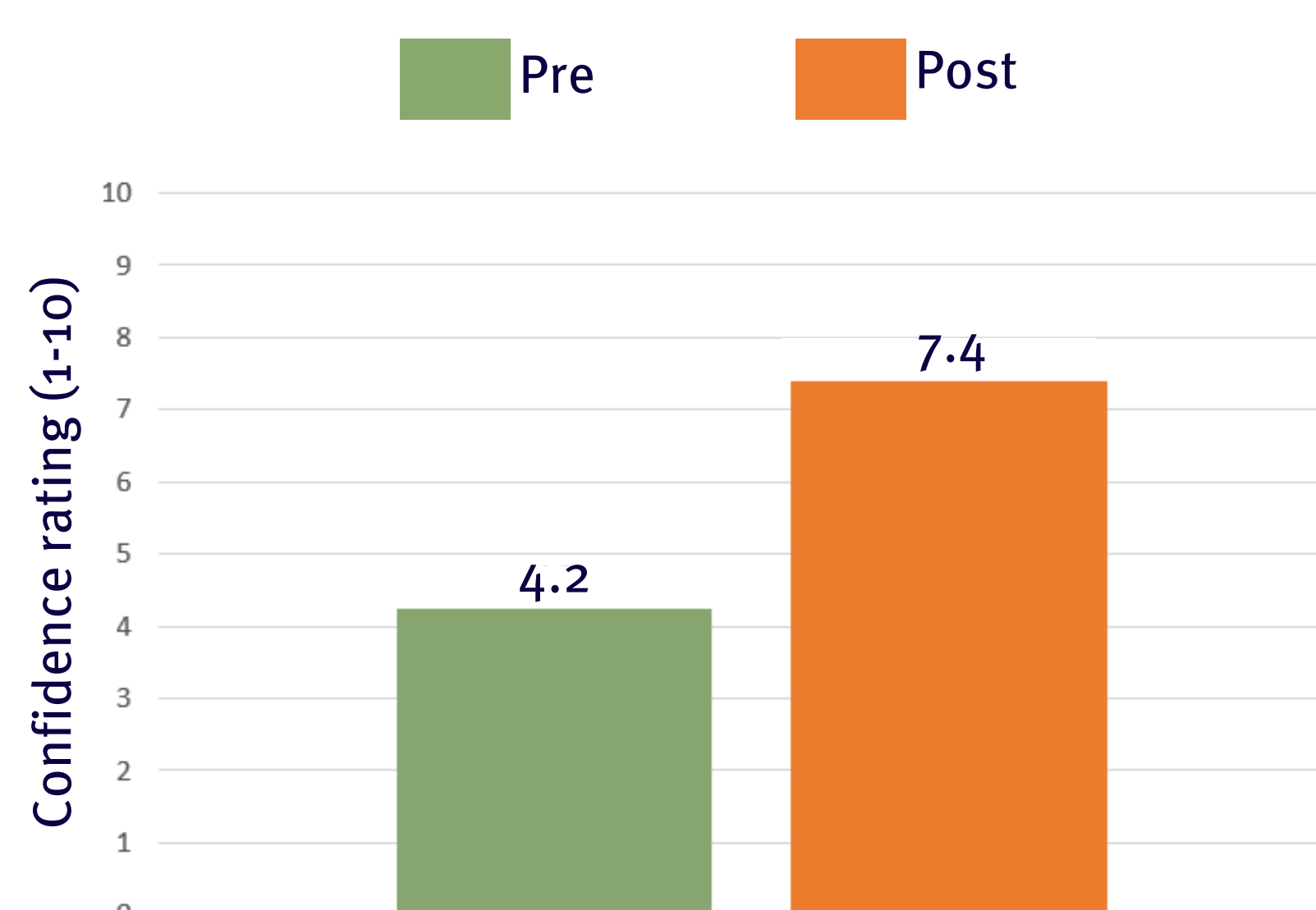


RESULTS

The program demonstrated marked improvements in both food literacy and social connection.

- Students who cooked a meal in the last week increased from 20% to 48% post-program.
- Confidence in cooking and nutrition increased by an average of 74% (measured on a 10-point Likert scale)
- Social connection between peers strengthened.

Pre- & Post-Average Confidence



'...it is very clear to us the [confidence] boost this program has given to our students.'
Teacher

'...have taken the time to get to know our students, their likes and dislikes, and address them each by name. That alone for some of our students, is huge.'
Teacher

References

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