

# Eat Well @ IGA – an innovative healthy supermarket initiative supported by IGA stores, Deakin University, the City of Greater Bendigo and VicHealth



## Why are healthy supermarket initiatives needed?

- Supermarkets account for a large proportion of all food and grocery spending (67% in Australia in 2019) <sup>1</sup>, representing a key setting for the promotion of healthy eating.
- Supermarket retailers and food manufacturers make extensive use of marketing techniques in-store, (modifying product, price, promotion, and placement) to encourage customers to buy and eat more. <sup>2</sup> Foods high in salt, fat, and sugar are frequently the focus of these marketing efforts. <sup>3</sup>
- The potential to promote a healthy diet using the same in-store marketing techniques has been increasingly recognised <sup>4</sup> and successful implementation and long-term maintenance of initiatives are crucial to achieving population health benefits.

<sup>1</sup> Euromonitor International (2020) 'Retailing in Australia'. Available at: <https://www.portal.euromonitor.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> Hawkes, C. (2009). "Sales promotions and food consumption." *Nutr Rev* 67(6): 333-342. <https://doi:10.1111/j.1753-4887.2009.00206.x>.

<sup>3</sup> Cameron, A. J., et al. (2013). "Variation in supermarket exposure to energy-dense snack foods by socio-economic position." *Public Health Nutr* 16(7): 1178-1185. <https://doi:10.1017/S1368980012002649>

<sup>4</sup> Cameron AJ, et al. (2016). "A Systematic Review of the Effectiveness of Supermarket-Based Interventions Involving Product, Promotion, or Place on the Healthiness of Consumer Purchases." *Current Nutrition Reports* 5(3): 129-138. <https://doi:10.1007/s13668-016-0172-8>.

## Summary of the Eat Well @ IGA intervention

- The Eat Well @ IGA initiative (2016-2018) was a randomized controlled trial carried out in Australian supermarkets to test a multi-component healthy eating initiative.
- Over 12 months (2017-2018), five *Eat Well @ IGA* supermarkets promoted healthier foods, in particular fruit and vegetables.
- The project used marketing tactics such as shelf tags for products with a 4.5 or 5 Health Star Rating, trolley and basket signs, in-store posters, shelf wobblers and aisle fins, brochures, and social media promotions.
- Overall, the intervention was associated with 10% increase in the sales of fruits and vegetables store wide,<sup>5</sup> with effect of the program increasing over the 12 months it was in place.<sup>6</sup>
- Supermarket staff were highly supportive of the initiative, and 97% of surveyed customers agreed that IGA should continue its efforts to encourage healthy eating.<sup>7</sup>
- The partnership between the retailer, local government, VicHealth and Deakin University researchers was critical to the success of the project.
- Sharing the barriers and enablers of this successful initiative can lead to wide-scale implementation of healthy supermarket initiatives.<sup>8</sup>

*"The great thing is that everything we introduced as part of this project was designed to be low-cost and feasible for the retailer. With the success of the program, we hope that more IGA stores will focus on encouraging healthy eating"* explains Associate Professor Adrian Cameron, the lead researcher from Deakin University.

## Want to work with supermarkets to improve health outcomes?

Here are six key lessons from the *Eat Well @ IGA* initiative:

- 1 • **Co-design is crucial, make sure to engage stakeholders from the beginning and foster long-term relationships.**

Recognise stakeholder strengths and motivations for engaging with the project and consider the benefits of collaborating across multiple sectors including retail, academic and government. Work towards interventions that are effective, feasible and acceptable to all partners.

*"So, we sort of all sat down and discussed a range of options for what we could try in those stores and together we decided on the Health Star Rating shelf tags, the trolley signs and...the floor signs."* - Local Government Research Officer

<sup>5</sup> Final report of the NHMRC Project Partnership Grant supported by VicHealth: "A multi-component supermarket intervention to promote healthy eating" (NHMRC Partnership Project Grant APP1133090).

<sup>6</sup> Blake et al. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity (2021) 18:36. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-021-01104-z>

<sup>7</sup> Blake et al. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity (2021) 18:36. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-021-01104-z>

<sup>8</sup> Blake et al. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity (2021) 18:36. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-021-01104-z>





**2 Supermarkets understand that there is a broad industry change occurring in response to customer trends towards healthy eating.**<sup>9</sup>

Use this to encourage retailers to engage in initiatives that can be win/win:

*“I think the whole market's starting to change...people gravitating towards all those healthier type products. So, I think within a couple of years, the demand for those products – well, it's already there now, but it's going to be even stronger.”* - Store Manager.



**3 Healthy supermarket initiatives can be mutually beneficial.**<sup>10</sup>

Analysis of store sales data showed that fruit and vegetable sales increased by 10% in Eat Well @ IGA stores.<sup>11</sup>

*“One, the whole objective of the campaign was to try and influence or encourage people to eat healthier but also it was a win/win in the means of if we're selling more of those 4.5, 5 star [Health Star Rating] type products within our stores there's the potential of ... higher profit...”* - IGA Executive.



**4 In addition to profits, supermarkets also care about their corporate image, so it pays to highlight the community outcomes related to health promotion initiatives.**

For example, responding to community health needs based on context (poor health outcomes or deprivation).

*“...our demographics around here, it's probably - if you just make people make one [healthier] choice differently, it's a winner that way.”* - Store Manager.



**5 Regularly refresh the marketing material to maintain intervention effectiveness.**

*“We sometimes use the term ‘air pollution’, because sometimes it's just too busy and people don't stop and read. But the baskets and the trollies; it's basically right in the customer's face.”* - Store Manager.



**6 Plan and adapt for the future.**

Participants of the Eat Well @ IGA initiative almost universally desire scale-up to more IGAs and other supermarket chains. They also expressed a clear need for researcher or other central oversight to ‘correctly’ improve the healthiness of customer choices, rather than it being co-opted as purely a marketing tool.

*“I think if the results come back are good and everything's positive, I think the potential's huge more so from a macro or IGA brand.”* - IGA Executive.

<sup>9</sup> Blake et al. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity (2021) 18:36, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-021-01104-z>

<sup>10</sup> Blake et al. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity (2021) 18:36, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-021-01104-z>

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## Next steps for healthy supermarket initiatives

- By positioning their brands as socially responsible and putting greater focus on the health and wellbeing of their customers, supermarkets can play a significant role in improving population health outcomes.
- As a result of *Eat Well @ IGA*, a community of health promotion practitioners has arisen with an increasing number of healthy supermarket initiatives starting up in Victoria and throughout Australia.
- The **Nourish Network** Healthy Supermarkets Community of Practice (CoP) is chaired quarterly by **VicHealth** and is open to anyone with a passion for creating healthier supermarkets.
- If you are interested in creating healthier supermarket shopping environments offering nutritious, culturally appropriate, and local environmentally sustainable food, **[join the Healthy Supermarkets CoP today.](#)**
- *Eat Well @ IGA* is also part of **RE-FRESH**, the first international centre for healthy food retail research, policy, and practice. RE-FRESH includes more than 50 researchers providing the research evidence to support healthier retail of all types.

Please direct any enquiries about *Eat Well @ IGA* [to A/Prof. Adrian Cameron](#)



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