

Supermarkets that boost health

We turned junk food marketing tactics on their head to promote healthy food instead – here's what happened.

We all need fresh and nutritious food to lead a healthy life. But it is not easy when we're surrounded by cheap and unhealthy foods. Supermarkets account for a large proportion of food and grocery spending. And to increase their profits, some supermarkets strategically discount and give more shelf space to unhealthy food and drinks. They also use tactics like placing highly processed products in high visibility points like at the end of aisles and near checkouts, making it difficult for shoppers – especially kids – to miss.

Wouldn't it be great if supermarkets used similar tactics to promote healthy food options?

A number of pioneering communities are already making this happen. Together with health researchers, various supermarkets in Victoria are implementing in-store tactics that make it easier for customers to find and select healthy foods. And our Healthy Supermarkets Community of Practice is providing a platform for them to share ideas and learn from each other, so that more supermarkets can promote good health in their communities.

Tell me how

Over 12 months (2017-18), 5 Eat Well @ IGA supermarkets in Bendigo promoted healthier products, in particular fruits and vegetables. Following this work, [Eat Well Feel Good Ballarat \(EWFGB\)](#), piloted a nine-week project (April – July 2021) at three Ryan's IGA supermarkets (Midvale, Northway, and Pleasant Street) across Ballarat in Victoria.

Tactics used

At the supermarket, our attention is often drawn towards in-store advertising like signage and brochures. Normally these might be used to promote unhealthy food and drinks, but we turned this on its head by using them to promote and inform shoppers about healthy foods instead.

This included:

- Shelf tags for products with 4.5 or 5 Health Star Rating
- Trolley and basket signs
- Signage near the products themselves (shelf wobblers and aisle fins)

- Brochures and banners
- Social media promotions
- Floor and fridge stickers
- Recipe cards
- Staff badges

The Impact is real

At Eat Well @ IGA Bendigo

- 10% storewide increase in fruit and vegetables sales
- 97% of customers agreed that supermarkets should continue their efforts to encourage healthy eating

At Eat Well Feel Good Ballarat

- Of the 55.2% of customers who noticed the campaign materials, 46% of them believed that it influenced them while shopping².
- 93% of customers were highly supportive of the initiative²

This is what one store manager had to say about the initiative:

"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."

Want to work with supermarkets to improve health outcomes? Here's what we learned works.

- **Collaborative partnerships with stakeholders are crucial.** Recognising each other's strengths and motivations will help to forge a strong relationship and help develop interventions that are acceptable, feasible and effective.
- **Listen and respond to your community needs.** Customers wanted more support from supermarkets to help them find and select healthier food and drink options³.
- **Leverage the shift in customer trends towards healthy eating** to encourage retailers to participate in initiatives that are a win/win.
- **Staggering the launch of healthy supermarket initiatives across stores** (when working with multiple stores) means more process evaluation to guide subsequent launches.
- **Make use of learnings from previous healthy supermarket initiatives.** EWFGB was modelled on key elements of Eat Well @ IGA, whose project partners also supported this pilot, sharing learnings and resources. Make use of these networks and ask for resources!

- **Regular refresh of marketing materials is key** to maintaining the intervention effectiveness. Customers also suggested advertising online to promote healthy eating options.³
- **Corporate image:** Supermarkets benefit from highlighting their health promotion initiatives in the community.
- **Utilising the Store [Scout app](#) can be an effective way to measure the healthiness of stores.** It can also provide recommendations to improve the overall healthiness of stores.
- **Consider the sustainability of the interventions and capacity of your organisation to support this** – Fewer, larger, more static shelf signages could be a more sustainable option than shelf wobblers. During the Ballarat intervention, the campaign materials were monitored and maintained by Ballarat Community Health staff and volunteers, (acknowledged by store managers to be critical to the success of the project.) However, it is important to consider how to embed support of health promotion initiatives into the day-to-day work of supermarket staff.

Next steps

The Eat Well @ IGA intervention highlighted that supermarkets understand that there is a broad industry change occurring in response to customer trends towards healthy eating. Eat Well @ IGA has inspired other healthier supermarket interventions including EWFGB.

Phase two of EWFGB aims to focus on sustainability of current and new interventions such as making end of aisle displays healthier.

In collaboration with VicHealth and Nourish Network, our community of health promotion practitioners will continue to work to increase the number of healthy supermarket initiatives in Victoria and throughout Australia.

Stay tuned

Want to implement Healthy Supermarkets in your local community?

We have heaps of resources – reports, publications and visual guides.

Get in touch

Eat Well @ IGA: [A/Prof. Adrian Cameron](#)
[Eat Well Feel Good Ballarat](#)

About the Healthy Supermarkets Community of Practice:

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.

Interested in creating healthier supermarket shopping environments offering fresh, nutritious, culturally appropriate, and local environmentally sustainable food? [Join the Healthy Supermarkets CoP today.](#)

Meet the partners who made it happen:

- [Monash Store Scout App](#)
- [City of Greater Bendigo](#)
- [Ballarat Community Health \(BCH\)](#) (Supported by Ballarat Health Services, Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership)
- [Global Centre for Preventive Health and Nutrition \(GLOBE\)](#)
- [Institute for Health Transformation](#)

- [Deakin University](#)
- [The Centre for Research Excellence in Food Retail Environments for Health \(RE-FRESH\)](#)
- Ryan's IGA (Ballarat) and Champions IGA(Bendigo)
- Healthy Greater Bendigo, Monash University & The George Institute

1. Data collected through Store Scout App
2. Evaluation report, Eat Well Feel Good Ballarat. Ballarat Community Health, pp.3-22
3. Key findings from a 2018 community consultation initiated by Ballarat Community Health (BCH)