

The Dinner Table Project is a family-focused cooking program aimed at empowering families in socio-economically disadvantaged areas to spend more quality time together through preparing and sharing healthy, home-cooked meals. Research shows that families in lower-income areas, particularly those identified through SEIFA (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas), are less likely to share regular meals, contributing to poorer physical and mental health outcomes. The program enhances family relations and improves children's and their adults health by promoting healthy eating habits and increasing access to nutritious meals, while fostering family interactions around the dinner table.

Inputs

- **Project Coordinator and Facilitators:** Responsible for planning, delivering, and managing the program.
- **Volunteers:** Provide support in food preparation, organisation, and engagement with families.
- **Community Partnerships:** Collaboration for resources and outreach.
- **Community Centres:** Spaces for hosting weekly cooking and eating sessions.
- **Funding:** Financial support from grants, donations, and community sponsorships.
- **Online Platforms:** Closed Facebook groups for additional resources, support, and family interaction.



Outputs

Participants

- Families with children from disadvantaged communities within the Shellharbour Local Government Area (LGA) are the primary participants

Activities

- Six weekly 2.5-hour cooking and eating sessions.
- Nutrition education on meal planning, food preparation, and safe storage.
- Hands-on guided practice of basic cooking techniques using healthy ingredients.
- Opportunities for children and parents to practice leadership and communication skills.
- Positive role models guide families on building healthy habits and fostering effective communication.

Products

- Comprehensive data on family health, nutritional knowledge, and social connectedness collected through surveys and observations.



Outcomes & Impacts

Short term

- Increased knowledge about healthy behaviours, including healthy eating and active living.
- Higher daily intake of nutrition dense foods, and water.
- Greater understanding of the Australian Dietary Guidelines and practice application to everyday family meals.
- Enhanced confidence in basic cooking skills among both children and parents.
- Improved communication skills within families, leading to more meaningful conversations during meals.

Medium term

- Sustained knowledge of healthy eating, active living, and emotional resilience.
- Continued increase in the consumption of nutritious ingredients and water.
- Ongoing confidence in meal planning, cooking, and making healthier food choices as a family.
- Development of healthier family dynamics and stronger family bonds.
- Regular family meals together become a routine, enhancing social connectedness and reducing social isolation.

Long term

- Families consistently make healthy decisions about food, nutrition, physical activity, and social interactions.
- Improved family relationships and stronger emotional resilience and mental health.
- Increased frequency of cooking at home and eating meals together, fostering long-term healthy behaviours.
- Children and parents develop sustained confidence in their ability to maintain healthy eating.
- Increased sense of wellbeing.



Assumptions:

- Families will attend sessions regularly and actively participate.
- Engaged community partners and hands-on learning increases self-efficacy and promotes behaviour change.



External Factors:

- Funding availability, competing programs, and other local services accessible to participants.
- Weather conditions impacting the in-person nature of activities.
- Limitation of geographical area (place based).
- Family dynamics and situation impact attendance rates.