

Executive Summary

Unhealthy diets (i.e., excessive intake of over-processed food and low intake of fruits and vegetables) have been recognised as a significant driver of the increase in preventable non-communicable diseases globally. Supermarkets, where 63% of food purchases occur, often promote unhealthy products.



63%
of food
purchases occur
in supermarkets

Aim

The Reach for the Stars (RFTS) program aimed to improve the healthiness of supermarket environments in the Latrobe Valley to support the purchasing and consumption of healthier foods.

In 2024, **Reach for the Stars (RFTS) was implemented in five independent supermarkets**, with support from Latrobe Community Health Service.

The intervention included:

Eight weeks



Health Star
Rating shelf tags
and signage



Healthy
recipe
booklets



Staff training
and community
co-design

Six weeks

Two “nudge” trials promoting ...



Healthier
drinks



Healthier
snacks

E.g., eye-level placement, removal of king-size chocolates

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, including:

Store Scout audits

(pre- and post-intervention and during nudges)

Customer exit surveys

(pre- and post-intervention, n=131)

Sustainability survey post-intervention to interest holders* (n=12)

Interest holders* post-intervention interviews (n=11)

**supermarket staff and owners, consumers and health promotion staff*

Conclusions

Reach for the Stars effectively improved supermarket environments and influenced healthier consumer purchases. The program’s success was driven by strong community engagement, retailer collaboration, and adaptable strategies. To ensure long-term sustainability, continued funding, supermarket-led ownership, and broader policy support, such as a mandate for healthy retail, are essential.

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Store Scout scores showed increased healthiness

Post intervention **all stores improved their 'healthiness'** Store Scout scores by an **average of 8.8 points**.

IGA 1 showed the greatest improvement - increasing their overall Store Scout score by 12 points.

Fruit, vegetable, and cereal sections saw the greatest gains.



Health Star Rating System influenced shopping behaviours

>50% of participants regularly checked the Health Star Rating of a product.

Most customers found the Health Star Rating system easy to recognise and **used it to choose foods that are healthiest when shopping.**

61%–71% reported that the Health Star Rating influenced their purchases.



Improved understanding of the Health Star Rating System



Awareness of the Health Star Rating system increased from **70% to 78%**.



25% more customers correctly recognised **fruits and vegetables** as **5-star items**.



There was a **21% increase** in customers correctly **using stars to compare the healthiness** of similar products.

Appreciation for the program's simplicity, community relevance, and strong partnerships

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Retailers expressed willingness to continue promoting healthy choices with ongoing support and simplified implementation tools.

A focus on promoting healthy foods, rather than criticising unhealthy ones, aligned with customer recommendations and mental health concerns.

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Customers strongly supported supermarkets continuing strategies to promote healthy foods

>80% of customers agree that supermarkets should ...

- ✓ continue encouraging healthy eating,
- ✓ have more shelf space for healthy foods,
- ✓ offer price discounts on healthy foods,
- ✓ offer a large range of healthy foods and drinks, including meals/snacks/ convenience foods.



Sustainability of Reach for the Stars

The program scored **an average of 5.6 out of 7 across sustainability domains**.

Strongest areas were program evaluation (6.2), environmental support (6.1), and communication (6.0).

Funding stability was the lowest (4.1).

Recommendations



Enhance Funding Stability

Action: Develop a diversified funding strategy that includes local government, health agencies, and private sector partnerships.

Rationale: The sustainability survey identified funding stability as the weakest domain (average score: 4.1/7). Long-term success depends on consistent financial support.



Strengthen Organisational Integration

Action: Embed RFTS practices into store operations through formal policies, staff roles, and routine procedures.

Rationale: Retailers expressed willingness to continue the program but noted the need for clearer integration into daily workflows.



Simplify Implementation Tools

Action: Continue refining promotional materials (e.g., shelf strips instead of individual tags) and provide ready-to-use templates for signage and recipes.

Rationale: Simplicity was a key factor in success. Retailers preferred tools that were easy to maintain and implement.



Expand Retailer Engagement

Action: Engage additional supermarkets, including major chains (e.g., Coles, Woolworths), and advocate for IGA head office policy support.

Rationale: Broader participation would increase community exposure and impact. Current reach is limited to smaller, independent stores.



Leverage Community Partnerships

Action: Collaborate with schools, food relief organisations, and local clubs to extend program visibility and impact.

Rationale: Stakeholders suggested partnerships could enhance reach and reinforce healthy eating messages beyond the supermarket, such as school canteens.



Ongoing monitoring

Action: Conduct Store Scout assessments every 4-6 months.

Rationale: Regular assessments enable the timely identification of performance gaps, facilitating prompt corrective actions. This information can be integrated into store practices to ensure training efforts are effective and aligned with operational goals.



Advocate for Policy Change

Action: Collaborate with local, state, and national-level health authorities to advocate for policy changes that foster healthy food retail environments.

Rationale: Policy support could institutionalise healthy retail practices and reduce reliance on short-term funding.