Why is health and wellbeing important for learning?

Schools have a critical role in supporting students to make healthy lifestyle choices and to understand consequences on lifelong health and wellbeing. The link between health and wellbeing and positive academic performance is well researched:

- Healthy students are more alert, engaged and better able to concentrate and learn
- poorly nourished children are often tired, apathetic and unable to concentrate
- physical activity is associated with improved learning and concentration, better mood and behaviour as well as healthy weight
- smoking, drinking and other drug substances severely impact a student’s cognitive functions (concentration, memory, attention), capacity to behave appropriately, and frequently leads to the student engaging in further risky behaviour
- developing strong, supportive relationships in schools provides a safer and more inclusive environment for students to engage in their studies and learn.

Childhood and adolescence are critical periods for developing attitudes, skills and knowledge for living a healthy life. During this time students notice, assess and make judgements about what is normal and desirable. Their choices depend on a host of variables such as, what is easily accessible, what is cost effective, what their peers choose, what is common practice at home and their experiences. People make choices from what they know. A student’s health and wellbeing is dynamic and changeable.

Schools inform choices and deepen understanding of what constitutes good health choices. Schools present learning opportunities that build upon family/cultural experiences and allow for critical analysis of media, advertising and peer conformity.

Schools have a responsibility to teach, model, build behaviour practices and implement curriculum requirements that support a learning environment where the connection of learning about health and wellbeing is supported by alignment of action across a whole school approach.