

MEDIA RELEASE

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HEALTHY HIGHWAYS WINS STATE'S BEST AS IT CHANGES SHAPE OF COORONG



(From left: Mayor Jaensch with Council OPAL staff Emily Arbon and Tanja Morgan accepting their award from State Member for Elder, Annabel Digance, and Dr Chris Lease from SA Health)

Coorong Healthy Highways (CHH) has eclipsed all expectations, taking out a prestigious State health award on its way to changing the shape of the district's eating out culture.

Last night, the Coorong District Council initiative was named winner of the *2017 South Australian Minister for Health's Excellence in Public Health Award* (regional category), with a \$3,000 cheque offering a feather in the cap for this innovative nutrition program.

This award recognises and reiterates evidence from the program's recently released evaluation report, which clearly points out that local government-business partnerships can create a healthier community.

The new CHH evaluation report by Flinders University Nutrition and Dietetics students, reveals an increasing number of Coorong consumers are cutting out deep fried food, in favour of freshly grilled meats, salads, sushi and other healthy alternatives.

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Coorong District Council Mayor Neville Jaensch said while the win was an honour for the Council and its dedicated OPAL team, it was a more important win for community wellbeing and the health of future generations.



“Coorong Healthy Highways has created a turnaround for consumer and business confidence, and the exceptional outcomes speak for themselves,” Mayor Jaensch says.

“With almost half of the Coorong population reported as being overweight or obese, it's not only the health of our residents that is starting to improve, but demand for new healthy products from the 23 accredited outlets, is on the rise.

“We also believe this is the first project of its kind in Australia, with a unique partnership between the Council, OPAL, health agencies and business being key to success.

“There were plenty of barriers and reasons why we could've put this concept in the 'too-hard basket', but instead, our team took an opportunity to create positive and lasting change, and it's a great legacy for our OPAL team to be proud of.”

Adding to the excitement was the recent announcement that CHH is also a finalist in the *2017 South Australian Local Government Excellence Awards* – with winners to be announced this Friday, Mayor Jaensch is hoping it will be another cause to celebrate.

“Priority has always been improving community health, however another outcome has been the support of businesses, now willing to invest in the program long term,” Mayor Jaensch says.

“It's these far-reaching benefits making it so strong on the State and national stage. We have a community, businesses, tourists and even our schools benefitting from the new menus.”

All of this has happened in less than 12 months, when the project launched in October 2016.

Leading the charge is Coorong OPAL Manager Tanja Morgan who said her team was driven to take on this challenge after learning that higher rates of obesity in rural communities were linked to limited access to healthy foods.

“In recent years, community members have told us they're always seeking out healthier options while travelling, especially for children,” Mrs Morgan says.

“Things like soft drink and deep-fried or pre-packaged foods are readily available, but until now, more nutritious options were not. We saw the perfect opportunity to do something.

“It's certainly been the most challenging project OPAL has embarked upon, but with 23 outlets now signed up; businesses profiting from healthy food sales; and a community excited about new healthy menus, we couldn't be prouder.”

Mrs Morgan said a great example was one business reported having to dramatically increase the number of fruit salads it was delivering to the local school each day, with some schools even considering exclusively using CHH outlets for catering.

“It’s exciting to think that last year we were knocking on doors just to start a conversation on the project. Now, business owners hear about its success and come to us.”



The evaluation report also revealed that Coorong Healthy Highways multi-strategy marketing campaign was key to its success, something quite new to local outlets.

“Upwards of 50,000 people have seen Coorong Healthy Highways on Facebook, and almost 4,000 people nationally have explored the new website. This is promotional awareness that many of these small businesses could never have dreamed of,” Mrs Morgan says.

“Now 80 per cent of CHH member businesses are willing to pay an ongoing subscription fee to remain a part of the program – so the future is looking brighter than ever.”

For more information, check out the website: www.cooronghealthyhighways.com.au.

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Coorong Healthy Highways Fast Facts

- 23 food outlets are signed up as members of the CHH program, 20 are accredited (3 awaiting)
- No business has dropped out of the program since becoming accredited
- No negative feedback was given about the perception of CHH in evaluation surveys
- Outlets include roadhouses, cafes, supermarkets, restaurants, bakeries and take-away
- CHH outlets reported sourcing nutritious ingredients was “easy”
- Popular food items on CHH menus are grilled Coorong mullet, vegetarian lasagne, chicken burgers/wraps, pre-prepared salads, energy balls, sushi and cold rolls
- The majority of outlets reported increased sales in healthy menu items (including one bakery which could not keep up with the demand for takeaway salads and sandwiches)
- One restaurant noted up to 80 per cent of local customers were shifting to reduced serves of hot chips
- Program has been named as a finalist in two prestigious South Australian awards, with the winners to be announced in April 2017
- Local schools are favouring catering from CHH accredited menus
- 80 per cent of businesses are willing to pay an annual fee to ensure CHH remains long term
- All businesses valued input from OPAL, citing them as going “above and beyond”
- CHH has been supported by the Heart Foundation, Flinders University and the Premier’s Healthy Kids Menu Taskforce