

MDAS launches Deadly Choices in Mildura: A tobacco, alcohol and sugar free event!

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) Nutrition group caught up with Jade Klæbe, Prevention and Health Promotion Officer at [Mallee District Aboriginal Health Services](#), to have a yarn about the launch of [Deadly Choices](#) Mildura.

MDAS launched Deadly Choices on the 6th of April 2018 at Nowingi Place Mildura and promoted the launch as a tobacco, alcohol and sugar free event.

It was the first time that MDAS Mildura has coordinated a big Community event that was promoted as tobacco free, alcohol free and sugar free.

Check out the YouTube video, '[Healthy Decisions. Deadly Decisions](#)', of the MDAS Deadly Choices launch!



Bonnie Andrews and Sharni Karpany

Keys to success

The launch was full of fun, games and relaxation activities for everyone!

NRL legend and Deadly Choices ambassador Preston Campbell came along and spoke passionately about how staying healthy and strong has been important throughout his life.

There were heaps of things happening, including meditation and yoga, drum beats, tai chi, Indigenous games, touch rugby, auspicious, Zumba, face painting and arts and crafts. Drum beats is a great low impact activity that promotes physical and social and emotional wellbeing and is suitable for everyone – from children through to Elders.

MDAS put on a deadly, healthy barbecue lunch with multigrain breads, salads and lean meats (no sausages!) and there was fresh fruit available. The sugar for tea and coffee was at the back of the catering table so it was a little trickier to see!

MDAS provided the VACCHO #DrinkWaterUMob refillable water bottles, which were a big hit, and made sure that chilled tap water was available. There was also signage at the entrance to Nowingi Place to let everyone know that event was tobacco, alcohol and sugar free. If anyone arrived with a soft drink they were asked to not bring it in.

“Everyone was very welcoming of the event being tobacco, alcohol and sugar free, especially when we had a yarn with Community about why we were doing it.”

Jade Klaebe, Prevention and Health Promotion Officer, MDAS

Before the Deadly Choices launch, MDAS implemented a refreshed healthy catering policy across all of MDAS's health and family services centres in Mildura, Swan Hill, Kerang and Robinvale. The policy focuses on healthy, tasty foods and drinks that MDAS promotes and provides and also outlines foods that should not be catered. Foods including wholemeal and multigrain breads, fruit, vegies, lean meats and reduced fat dairy make the cut, whilst white bread, pastries, deep fried foods and sugary drinks are off the menu.

Jade met with the vending machine supplier to MDAS Mildura and has developed a plan to replace the high fat, sugar and salt foods and drinks with healthier options. In the next couple of months the vending machine will have only healthy options!

Challenges

Community members could have their vital signs checked in a health tent at the Deadly Choices launch and over 100 people took this up! Community were then encouraged to book in for a health check at MDAS and pick up an awesome Deadly Choices top. The tops were being asked for at the launch but it's important that Community go on to have the full health check at the Health Service. MDAS has seen an increase in health checks undertaken since the Deadly Choices launch, which is fantastic.

There were some mixed messages around the Deadly Choices launch being sugar free. Some people thought that this meant that there would be no sugar at the event but it was only about not having sugary drinks like soft drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, slurpees and cordial there. Fruit and other healthy foods that have natural sugar were available and promoted.

Advice for others coordinating a Community health promotion event

Running a big Community event in the school holidays can be a good idea. The Deadly Choices launch was great holiday fun for the family and it meant that more Community was able to come along.

If you're running a Community event outside, try to have it in a month that usually has good weather - not too hot and not too cold!

It really helped to have Community role models joining in the activities on the day as it encouraged other Community members to have a go. A supportive CEO, deadly ambassadors and other Community role models is really important to the success of the program and the launch.

MDAS also made sure that tap water available at the launch was appealing. Providing chilled water helped and having the VACCHO #DrinkWaterUMob refillable water bottles to give out was really good.

In promoting the event as sugar free, MDAS staff didn't just say, "No sugary drinks!" They brought the Community along on the journey and yarned about why MDAS supports a sugary drink free environment. Everyone is really supportive of promoting water as the drink of choice.

MDAS launched the Deadly Choices and MDAS partnership in Swan Hill on the 12th of April, in Kerang on the 18th of May and will launch in Robinvale in the coming weeks.

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