



## ABC in Action: Far North Queensland Hospital Foundation's Journey to Healthier Food Environments

**The Far North Queensland (FNQ) Hospital Foundation has made significant progress in promoting healthier food environments through the implementation of the *A Better Choice (ABC) Strategy*.**

Leading this transformation at Sea Breeze Café and dCafé is Michael Hooper, Social Enterprise Operations Manager from the FNQ Hospital Foundation, a local non-profit charity dedicated to funding health initiatives across the FNQ region. Michael's leadership and vision have driven innovation across their two retail cafés. In collaboration with Michael Orford, Head Chef, the team has successfully integrated fresh, nutritious menu options, making healthier choices readily available to staff and visitors.

### Leadership, motivation, and organisational support

The success of the [ABC Strategy](#) stems from strong leadership and a clear commitment to health promotion. Michael's personal passion for healthy eating was a key motivator behind his support for the initiative.

After engaging with the ABC Statewide coordinator, and other key stakeholders, he was inspired to improve the cafés offerings. Backed by the FNQ Hospital Foundation, the team has fostered a culture of health and continuous improvement.

Key individuals played a vital role in driving this transformation. The Foundation's Head Chef Michael Orford led the kitchen operations, while a local fruit and vegetable supplier supported the initiative by donating fresh fruit weekly. Together, the team introduced a free fresh fruit stand and made a pivotal shift from deep-fried items to oven-baked alternatives, promoting healthier choices.

They also embraced ABC tools such as [FoodChecker](#) and planograms to ensure consistent implementation. The cafés were thoughtfully designed to be welcoming spaces that support both the emotional and physical wellbeing of the hospital community. Reflecting the growing demand and success of this people-first approach, the production kitchen now operates seven days a week.



*Healthy options looking fresh at Sea Breeze Café, Cairns.*

# A Better Choice

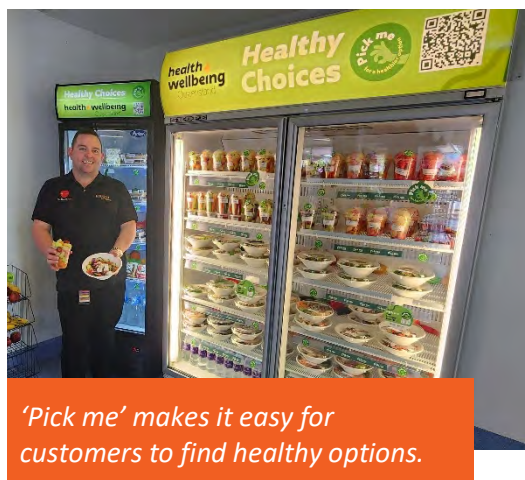
Healthy options made easy



## Innovations for Healthier Choices: Transforming Retail and Vending

A major innovation was the introduction of fridges stocked exclusively with 100% 'green' classified items - products identified as the healthiest choices under the ABC Strategy.

These fridges have had a noticeable impact on consumer behaviour, encouraging healthier purchasing habits. The 'Pick Me' campaign, combined with strategic product placement using planograms, further enhanced product visibility and guided customers toward healthier choices.



*'Pick me' makes it easy for customers to find healthy options.*

Michael also oversaw the transformation of the cafés advertising, introducing window displays that featured Health and Wellbeing Queensland messaging and QR codes linking to ABC resources. These efforts boosted customer engagement and increased awareness of the ABC Strategy, with many patrons' expressing appreciation for the fresh food options and showing genuine interest in learning more about the ABC Strategy.

One notable interaction involved an elderly customer asking for help to scan a QR code to learn more about the strategy - an inspiring example of the growing

community connection created through the initiative.

## Promoting Fresh Choices

A standout approach was the partnership with the local fruit and vegetable supplier to provide complimentary fresh fruit every Monday. This clever approach to promoting healthy snacking is supported by a dedicated fruit stand and promotional signage, encouraging customers to choose fruit over less nutritious alternatives. Staff actively promote this initiative at the point of purchase, reinforcing the message of conscious, healthier choices.

The impact of these changes has been substantial. Demand for healthy food has surged, with daily salad production increasing from around 15 salads per day to approximately 80, and fruit cups becoming a popular alternative to traditional snacks. Fruit salad sales have grown from 5 kg per week to around 18–25 kg per week. Sushi and monthly 'green' specials are also in strong demand.

Importantly, these shifts have coincided with an approximate 35% increase in profits at dCafé. At Seabreeze, 'green' items alone now generate around \$1,000 per day in profit. The clear change in consumer preferences highlights the success of the ABC Strategy in aligning food offerings with the community's health goals.

*"Now that we have a clear vision and understanding of ABC... we just keep growing our green lines as much as we possibly can."*

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## The Impact of Healthy Changes: Future Plans and Sustainability

Initial challenges, such as becoming familiar with 'green' category products and learning to navigate tools like FoodChecker were successfully overcome through early support and ongoing training. Planograms proved to be a game changer, streamlining product placement, enhancing staff training, and improving consistency across the cafés.

Looking ahead, the cafés are preparing for further growth and innovation. Planned upgrades include the introduction of vacuum-sealing technology to extend food shelf life and reduce food waste. Additionally, the hospital is investing in new ovens to support the continued shift from deep-frying to oven-baking methods, further reinforcing commitment to healthier food preparation.

Fresh food vending has also proven highly successful, with two ABC-compliant machines within the hospital generating approximately \$10,000 per month in sales. To improve access to healthy options outside regular business hours, the machines are stocked daily by the team with convenient, nutritious choices such as salads, wraps and fruit cups, available seven days a week. Building on this momentum, the team is expanding fresh food vending across Cairns Community and growing their workforce to support the expansion. FNQ Hospital Foundation will be placing 40 fresh food vending machines in the next 12 months.

Through visionary leadership, strategic partnerships, and a steadfast commitment to health and sustainability, the FNQ Hospital Foundation has set a new benchmark for hospital food retail and vending services. The successful implementation of the ABC Strategy at Sea Breeze Café and dCafé stands as a compelling example of how motivated leadership and collaborative effort can drive meaningful, long-term change in healthcare environments.



*Michael showcasing Far North Queensland Hospital Foundation's healthy food offering.*

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