



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



NATIONAL NUTRITION WEEK CONCEPT NOTE

CREATING HEALTHY FOOD ENVIRONMENTS FOR BETTER NUTRITION

9-15 October 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Theme-Rationale	2
Objectives	3
Key messages	3
Expected outcomes	4
Target audience	4
IEC material	4
NNW Activities	5
Monitoring and evaluation	5
References	6
Appendix A: Key messages	7
Appendix C: Q& A	10
Appendix B: Speaking Points	12
Appendix D: Report Template	13

CONCEPT NOTE: NATIONAL NUTRITION WEEK 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

National Nutrition Week (NNW) is commemorated annually from 9 to 15 October to raise awareness of the importance of good nutrition and mobilise individuals, communities and organisations to take action that supports healthier diets and improved nutritional well-being.

South Africa continues to face the triple burden of malnutrition, characterised by undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and rising levels of overweight and obesity^{1,2}. At the same time, many households' experience food insecurity and limited access to affordable, nutritious foods, while unhealthy foods high in sugar, salt and fats are often widely available, heavily marketed and relatively inexpensive^{3,4}. These conditions contribute to the growing burden of diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and highlight the need for action beyond individual behaviour change.

The 2026 NNW theme, "**Creating Healthy Food Environments for Better Nutrition**," emphasises the importance of collective action to create environments that support healthier food choices. Recognising that the places where people live, learn, work, and obtain food influence dietary behaviours, NNW 2026 will promote activities across homes, early childhood development centres, schools, workplaces and communities. These efforts aim to promote equitable access to safe, nutritious, and affordable foods, strengthen food security and support healthy dietary practices throughout the life course.

A food environment comprises the physical, economic, social, and policy factors that shape food availability, affordability, accessibility, and promotion, ultimately influencing people's food choices and dietary patterns⁵. A healthy food environment makes nutritious foods and safe drinking water readily available, accessible and affordable while limiting the availability and marketing of foods and beverages high in salt, sugar, and fats, making the healthy choice the easy choice⁶.

2. THEME – RATIONALE

Food choices are influenced not only by individual preferences and behaviours but also by the broader food environment in which foods are produced, marketed, sold and consumed⁷. Healthy food environments make safe, nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate foods more available, accessible and appealing, enabling healthier choices to become the easier choices.

The NNW 2026 theme calls for a whole-of-society approach to creating healthier food environments across homes, early childhood development centres, schools, workplaces and communities. It encourages collaboration across government, civil society, the private sector and communities to improve access to healthy foods, support local food systems, promote healthier food choices and strengthen food security.

This whole-of-society approach supports the implementation of the Strategy for the Prevention and Management of Obesity in South Africa and complements the National

Food and Nutrition Security Plan and the National Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs. It also reinforces other key public health nutrition policies and legislation that promote healthier diets, improve food security, and reduce malnutrition and diet-related NCDs.

3. OBJECTIVES

- Raise awareness about the role of food environments in shaping food choices and nutrition
- Promote access to safe, affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food
- Encourage and promote local food production
- Foster multisectoral collaboration for healthier food environments
- Empower consumers and communities to advocate for healthier food environments

4. TABLE 1: KEY MESSAGES (SEE APPENDIX A FOR DETAILS)

(a) Attend antenatal care early, eat a healthy diet before, during and after pregnancy, and take the recommended supplements provided by your healthcare provider to give every baby the healthiest start in life.
(b) Protect, promote and support breastfeeding by breastfeeding exclusively for the first six months, continuing breastfeeding up to two years and beyond, and introducing safe, nutritious and age-appropriate complementary foods from six months.
(c) Support children to grow and thrive by practising responsive feeding, nutritious meals and snacks, healthy lunchboxes, regular growth monitoring, and nutrition education from an early age.
(d) Build supportive communities that protect breastfeeding, encourage healthy eating, strengthen family and peer support.
(e) Choose healthy and diverse meals throughout life by eating plenty of vegetables, fruit, beans, legumes, whole grains and other minimally processed foods, while limiting foods high in salt, sugar and fats.
(f) Create healthy food environments at home, in early childhood development centres, schools, workplaces and communities where nutritious foods and safe drinking water are the easy choice.
(g) Promote household and community food gardens and local food production.
(h) Increase access to affordable, safe and nutritious foods by supporting local farmers and informal traders to make healthier food choices more available, visible and accessible.
(i) Choose water as the drink of choice and reduce sugary drinks, highly processed foods, and foods high in salt, sugar and fats to improve health and prevent non-communicable diseases.
(j) Health professionals, employers, educators, retailers and community leaders all have a role in protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding, healthy eating, and good nutrition across the life course.
(k) Governments, organisations and communities must work together to strengthen policies, create healthy food environments, improve food security, and ensure everyone has access to affordable, safe and nutritious food.

5. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Increased public understanding of what constitutes a healthy food environment and its impact on nutrition and health
- Increased awareness among communities, ECDs, schools, and workplaces of their role in supporting healthy food choices
- Improved knowledge of affordable healthy food options, local foods, indigenous foods and seasonal produce
- Increased awareness of the benefits of household and community food gardens for improving access to nutritious foods
- Improved awareness of simple food waste reduction practices, such as meal planning, proper food storage and using leftovers

6. TARGET AUDIENCE

- Early childhood development centres
- Schools
- Workplaces
- Communities
- Tuckshop operators and vendors in and around schools

7. IEC MATERIALS

- Posters and pamphlets, (pamphlets to be shared digitally, and hard copies can be distributed where feasible.)
- Audio and visual materials designed to accommodate individuals with hearing or visual impairments were feasible
- Content tailored for social media platforms
- Official Hash-tag messages: (i) #NNWZA2026 (ii) #NationalNutritionWeekZA2026 (iii) #BetterNutrition

8. TABLE 2: ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL NUTRITION WEEK 2026

Event	Target audience	Date	Venue
National event (NDOH)	Community	8 October	Welkom, Free State
National event (DBE)	Schools	16 and 30 October	Edenhoogte and Nhlonhlweni Primary Schools
National Nutrition Week 2026 stakeholder activation webinar	NNW Stakeholders	6 October	Knowledge Hub Platform
Healthy eating in the workplace memorandum circulation through DPSA and GCIS	Government Employees	9-15 October	DPSA and GCIS communication platforms
Media engagement (ADSA led)	General Public	9-15 October	Radio, podcasts and TV

9. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Reach and engagement: Facilities, districts, and provinces will report on the number of awareness sessions held, people reached, and pamphlets or posters distributed. Nationally, the Department of Health and partners will track campaign hashtags across social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok.

Healthcare Provider Feedback: Providers will share insights on public receptivity to nutrition messages and materials. They will also report on implementation challenges, resource gaps, and recommendations to improve future NNW campaigns.

10. REFERENCES

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2. National Department of Health (NDoH) and South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) and Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) (2019). South Africa Demographic and Health Survey 2016. Pretoria, South Africa.
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4. National Department of Health & DSI-NRF Center of Excellence in Food Security. (2022). Foods procured, Nutritional status and Dietary Intake of People Living in South Africa: Desktop review. Pretoria: National Department of Health, South Africa.
5. High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE). (2017). Nutrition and Food Systems. A report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security. Rome: FAO.
6. World Health Organization. (2021). Action framework for developing and implementing public food procurement and service policies for a healthy diet. Geneva: WHO.
7. Makhura, M. N., & Maseko, S. (2023). Associations among Food Systems, Food Environments, Food Choices, Food Security, and Nutrition Transition in Limpopo Province, South Africa: A Cross-Sectional Study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(16), 6563.

11. APPENDIX A: KEY MESSAGES – NATIONAL NUTRITION WEEK 2026

Target audience	Key messages
Infants and Young Children (First 1,000 Days)	• Attend antenatal care early, eat a healthy diet before and during pregnancy, and take recommended supplements. • Breastfeed exclusively for the first six months. • Continue breastfeeding up to two years and beyond • Introduce safe, nutritious, diverse and age-appropriate complementary foods (family foods) at six months. • Feed children responsive, varied meals prepared from healthy foods. • Avoid sugary drinks and foods high in salt, sugar and fats for infants and young children.
Families and households	• Create a home that supports healthy eating for every family member. • Support mothers to breastfeed exclusively for the first six months and continue breastfeeding up to two years and beyond. • Promote household gardens • Prepare healthy family meals using vegetables, fruit, beans, whole grains such as brown bread, sorghum, brown rice, samp and including indigenous foods and other whole foods. • Reduce foods high in salt, sugar and fats. • Reduce food waste by planning meals and using leftovers safely.
Communities	• Build communities that support breastfeeding and healthy infant and young child feeding. • Support mothers and caregivers through family, peer support and community support groups. • Promote household and community food gardens to improve access to nutritious foods. • Support local farmers and food producers. • Advocate for healthy food environments for all.

Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres	• Support continued breastfeeding for children attending ECD centres. • Ensure meals and snacks are nutritious, safe and age appropriate. • Provide safe drinking water and encourage healthy eating habits from an early age. • Do not offer sugary drinks or foods high in salt, sugar and fats. • Work with parents to reinforce healthy feeding practices.
Schools	• Make healthy foods the easy choice at school. • Promote healthy lunchboxes and nutritious school meals. • Make safe drinking water the easy choice. • Support school food gardens and nutrition education. • Limit the availability and promotion of unhealthy foods.
Workplaces	• Create breastfeeding-friendly workplaces by providing time, space and support for expressing breastmilk and breastfeeding where possible. • Support maternity protection and flexible return-to-work arrangements. • Ensure healthy food and drinking water are readily available. • Promote healthy catering at meetings and workplace events. • Foster a workplace culture that supports employee health and wellbeing.
Health facilities and health professionals	• Protect, promote and support breastfeeding from pregnancy through early childhood. • Counsel families on exclusive breastfeeding and continued breastfeeding with complementary feeding. • Support responsive feeding and healthy complementary feeding practices. • Promote healthy eating across the life course. • Encourage families to access nutrition and growth monitoring services.

Informal traders (Including Tuckshop operators and vendors in and around schools)	• Increase the availability of healthier food options. • Sell fresh fruit, vegetables and other nutritious foods where possible. • Prepare and handle food safely. • Promote water as the preferred beverage. • Support local food systems by sourcing local produce.
Government and decision-makers	• Strengthen policies that create healthy food environments throughout the life course. • Protect, promote and support breastfeeding through effective maternity protection and implementation of the regulations relating to infant foodstuffs. • Improve access to affordable, safe and nutritious foods. • Strengthen measures to restrict the marketing and advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages to children • Invest in healthy schools, ECD centres, workplaces and communities. • Foster multisectoral collaboration to improve nutrition and food security.

12. APPENDIX B: Q & A

1. What is National Nutrition Week and why do we celebrate it?
National Nutrition Week is observed every year from 9 to 15 October to raise awareness about good nutrition and encourage action that helps South Africans enjoy healthier diets and better health throughout life.
2. Why is the 2026 theme "Creating Healthy Food Environments for Better Nutrition" important?
The foods we eat are influenced by what is available, affordable, accessible and promoted around us. Creating healthier food environments helps make healthy choices easier for everyone, whether at home, school, work or in the community.
3. What exactly is a food environment?
A food environment refers to the physical, economic, social and policy conditions that influence the foods people can access, afford, choose and consume. It includes the foods available in homes, schools, early childhood development centres, workplaces, shops, restaurants and communities, as well as how foods are marketed, priced and promoted.
4. What is a healthy food environment?
A healthy food environment is one where safe, nutritious and affordable foods and drinking water are readily available, while foods high in salt, sugar and fats are less available, less promoted and less frequently chosen.
5. Why does South Africa need healthier food environments?
South Africa continues to experience the triple burden of malnutrition: a) undernutrition b) micronutrient deficiencies c) overweight and obesity and diet-related NCDs Many communities also struggle with food insecurity while unhealthy foods are widely available. Creating healthier food environments helps address these challenges.
6. Who is responsible for creating healthy food environments?
Everyone has a role: a) Government develops supportive policies. b) Schools and ECD centres provide healthy meals. c) Employers create healthy workplaces. d) Food manufacturers, retailers and informal traders improve healthy food availability. e) Health professionals provide nutrition guidance. f) Families and communities encourage healthy eating. g) Individuals make healthier food choices whenever possible
7. Why are the first 1,000 days still important?
Good nutrition from pregnancy until a child's second birthday supports healthy growth, brain development and lifelong health. Healthy food environments should protect breastfeeding and ensure access to nutritious complementary foods.
8. How can families create healthier food environments?
Families can: a) Prepare healthy meals together. b) Eat more vegetables, fruit, beans and whole grains. c) Drink water instead of sugary drinks. (Make water the family drink) d) Limit foods high in salt, sugar and fats. e) Support breastfeeding. f) Grow food where possible. g) Reduce food waste.
9. What role do schools play

Schools can: a) Promote healthy lunchboxes. b) Support school nutrition programmes. c) Make water easily available. d) Develop school food gardens. e) Limit unhealthy foods sold at school. f) Teach healthy eating.
10. Are healthy foods always more expensive? Not necessarily. Many nutritious foods, such as beans, lentils, seasonal fruit and vegetables, whole grains, eggs and locally produced foods, can be affordable and provide excellent nutritional value. Planning meals, buying seasonal produce, reducing food waste, and preparing meals at home can also help families eat healthily while staying within their budget. Creating healthier food environments also means improving the availability and affordability of nutritious foods for everyone.
11. How can manufacturers and retailers make healthy choices easier? Manufacturers play a crucial role in shaping the food supply by reformulating products to reduce added sugars, sodium and saturated fats while increasing fibre and essential nutrients; providing clear nutrition labelling; offering appropriate portion sizes; limiting the marketing of unhealthy foods to children; and investing in affordable, nutritious products. Retailers help shape food choices by increasing the availability and visibility of healthy foods, offering affordable nutritious options, promoting drinking water, supporting clear food labelling, sourcing local produce where possible, and responsibly marketing foods, particularly those consumed by children.
12. What role do informal traders play? Informal traders are an important part of South Africa's food system and often provide affordable food close to where people live and work. They can contribute to healthier food environments by offering more nutritious food options such as fresh fruit and vegetables, preparing and handling food safely, promoting water instead of sugary drinks, and supporting local farmers by sourcing locally produced foods where possible. Supporting informal traders to improve access to healthy foods can strengthen nutrition, food security and local livelihoods.
13. What can municipalities and local government do to improve food environments? Municipalities and local government play a vital role in creating healthier communities by ensuring healthy food is available, accessible and safe. They can support household and community food gardens, local farmers' markets, access to safe drinking water, and food safety through environmental health services. They can also promote healthy food in municipal facilities and public events, support informal traders selling nutritious foods, and work with schools and communities to encourage healthy eating. By integrating nutrition into local planning, municipalities can make healthy choices easier for everyone
14. What can every South African do during National Nutrition Week? Everyone can: a) Support breastfeeding. b) Choose water more often. c) Eat more minimally processed foods. d) Buy local and seasonal produce. e) Read food labels. f) Support household and community food gardens. g) Reduce food waste. h) Encourage healthy food choices at home, school, work and in the community.

13. APPENDIX C: SPEAKING POINTS FOR – NATIONAL NUTRITION WEEK 2026- GUIDE TO TARGET AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

PURPOSE

These speaking points have been developed to support the consistent communication of National Nutrition Week (NNW) 2026 messages across all communication platforms and engagement activities. They are intended to assist health professionals, government officials, communication practitioners, partners and stakeholders when delivering presentations, interviews, community talks, social media content and media engagements.

How to use these speaking points

The speaking points are intended as a guide and may be adapted to suit the audience, communication platform and available time while ensuring that the core National Nutrition Week messages remain consistent.

Users are encouraged to:

- Tailor the language to suit the target audience while retaining the intended meaning.
- Select the most relevant speaking points based on the topic or audience.
- Use examples that reflect local contexts and experiences where appropriate.
- Encourage practical actions that individuals, families, communities and organisations can take to create healthier food environments.
- Reinforce the official National Nutrition Week theme, key messages and hashtags in all communications.

Refer to the Appendix A Key messages and Appendix C Frequently Asked Questions (Q&A) for additional information where needed.

Suggested applications: (Can be adapted for a set target audience)

Target audience	Speaking points	Call to action
Breastfeeding and the first 1,000 Days	Explain the importance of nutrition before and during pregnancy, exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding	Encourage families and workplaces to support breastfeeding mothers
Creating Healthy Food Environments	Explain what a healthy food environment is, why it matters, and that healthy choices should be the easy choices at home, school, work and in communities	Encourage people to make one change this week to improve their food environment.
Healthy Homes	Discuss planning healthy meals, making water the preferred drink, reducing highly processed foods and involving children in meal preparation.	Encourage families to prepare one healthy family meal together.

14. APPENDIX D: REPORTING TEMPLATE

THEME: CREATING HEALTHY FOOD ENVIRONMENTS FOR BETTER NUTRITION

Province: _____

District: _____

Sub-district/Facility/Organisation _____

Compiled by: _____

Designation: _____

Contact Details: _____

Date Submitted: _____

1. Introduction

National Nutrition Week (9–15 October 2026) aims to raise awareness of the importance of good nutrition and mobilise individuals, communities and organisations to support healthier diets and improved nutritional well-being. The 2026 campaign focuses on creating environments where healthy food choices are available, accessible, affordable and appealing across homes, schools, ECD centres, workplaces, communities and food retail settings. *[Tailor this with details for your district, province, or organization and target audience]*

2. Rationale

South Africa continues to face the triple burden of malnutrition alongside increasing diet-related non-communicable diseases. Food choices are strongly influenced by food environments. Creating healthy food environments requires collaboration across government, communities, civil society and the private sector to improve access to safe, nutritious and affordable foods, support local food systems and strengthen food security throughout the life course. *[Tailor this with details for your district, province, or organization and target audience].*

3. Level of activity

- ☐ National
- ☐ Provincial
- ☐ District
- ☐ Sub-district
- ☐ Facility level
- ☐ Community level

4. Type of activity

- ☐ Physical
- ☐ Hybrid
- ☐ Virtual
- ☐ TV / Radio Interview
- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ Other _____ (Specify)

5. Which audiences were targeted?

- ☐ Early childhood development centres
- ☐ Schools
- ☐ Workplaces
- ☐ Communities
- ☐ Informal traders
- ☐ Retail stores
- ☐ Other _____ (Specify)

6. Data Collected

Item	Responsible person
Total NNW awareness sessions/ events held	Facilities, districts, provinces, national and collaborators
Total people reached in NNW awareness sessions	Facilities, districts, provinces, national and collaborators
Total number of hashtags associated with NNW 2026 flagged on the following platforms: Facebook, X and LinkedIn	National Department of Health and collaborators

7. Improving Future National Nutrition Weeks

1. What challenges did you experience in delivering the key messages or engaging the community?
2. What suggestions do you have for improving Nutrition Week activities in the future?
3. What additional support, resources, or training would help you deliver nutrition messages more effectively?

Thank you for your involvement in NNW 2026 and this feedback.