

# DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE | New York City, New York

## Partnering With Food Distributors to Reduce Sodium

### Problem

Adults in New York City (NYC) consume 40% more sodium than the recommended daily limit, increasing their risk for hypertension and cardiovascular disease. Because NYC agencies collectively purchase and serve 245 million meals and snacks annually to some of New York's most vulnerable populations, the ability to provide healthy food environments is a priority.

### Project

In an effort to reduce sodium in the foods served in city agencies and hospitals, the health department launched the Good Choice program, a set of nutrition criteria based on the NYC Food Standards for food items purchased by food service providers.

### Outcomes

Through Good Choice, food distributors better identified foods that met the NYC Food Standards, allowing food service providers to more easily find and purchase healthier ingredients and provide healthy meals in their retail or cafeteria operation.

### Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Salt [www.cdc.gov/salt](http://www.cdc.gov/salt)
- NYC Good Choice Program <http://on.nyc.gov/2knBVSU>
- NYC Food Policy, Food Metrics Report (2016) <http://on.nyc.gov/2hxgT5P>

**Statement of Problem:** New York City (NYC) adults consume an average of 3,239 milligrams of sodium each day, which is 40% higher than the recommended limit set by the *2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.<sup>1</sup> High sodium intake can increase the risk of hypertension, and in NYC, prevalence of self-reported hypertension is higher among black (35.1%) and Latino (31.9%) adults than in white (23.0%) adults; it is highest in the poorest neighborhoods (33.6%) and lowest in the wealthiest (23.3%).<sup>2</sup> Hypertension is a key risk factor for cardiovascular disease, which accounts for more than one third of all deaths among New Yorkers each year.



Reducing sodium intake is a priority for the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (health department) and is a key component of broader efforts to create a healthier food environment in NYC in order to reduce the prevalence of chronic disease. Toward this end, the NYC Food Standards (the Standards) set sodium limits for individual food items purchased and overall meals served by city agencies. However, it can be challenging for food service providers to identify and purchase these lower sodium items.

**Project Description:** In 2014, with support from CDC's Sodium Reduction in Communities Program (SRCP), the health department launched Good Choice to increase access to healthier, lower sodium foods for NYC food service providers. Good Choice is a pilot program that helps food distributors identify items in their inventory that meet the Good Choice nutrition criteria. The program's criteria are based on the Standards, a set of evidence-based nutrition criteria that apply to distinct venues, including retail or cafeteria settings. The Standards have been implemented by 11 city agencies through a mayoral executive order since 2008 and by 40 public and private hospitals in NYC participating in the Healthy Hospital Food Initiative since 2010. The Good Choice nutrition criteria apply to 25 food and beverage categories, including prepackaged snacks, sliced bread, and salad dressing. Eighteen of these categories include specific limits on sodium.

The health department collaborated with three food distributors to review their full product inventory and identify products that meet the Good Choice criteria. The goal was to use distributors' online ordering systems and product lists to make this information easily accessible to food service providers. The health department provided technical assistance to distributors, city agencies, and hospitals. Health department staff conducted trainings with distributors' sales forces, attended food shows, and made presentations to sales staff at regional sales meetings to educate the sales force on Good Choice and to promote it to



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### For more information please contact

#### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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customers. In turn, distributors' customers, such as hospitals, senior centers, and day care centers, can more easily find and purchase healthier ingredients. As a part of the program, the health department also partnered directly with 34 food service providers to encourage them to participate in the Good Choice program. The 22 city agency programs and 12 private hospitals that participated in the program accessed the Good Choice product lists from their participating distributor for at least one year and continue to serve more than 13,000 meals daily to approximately 35,000 New Yorkers across Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx each year. Good Choice reaches a broad range of New Yorkers from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

**Outcomes:** City agencies saw improvements in five sodium specific Good Choice food categories. At city agencies, improvements were observed in food categories that had had the lowest percentage of products meeting the Good Choice criteria at baseline. For example, 52% of all salad dressings met the criteria at baseline, whereas 92% of salad dressings purchased at city agencies met the Good Choice criteria by the final assessment. Survey respondents from hospitals and city agencies participating in Good Choice described the program as an asset that increased the efficiency of their food service operations and provided a reliable tool for food service staff. A majority of food service providers either strongly agreed or agreed that “Good Choice makes it easier to identify and order healthier items” (98% of respondents), “using Good Choice makes it easier for me to follow the NYC Food Standards” (86%), and “Good Choice helps me offer a greater variety of healthy products” (77%). Good Choice was also described by many as a tool that makes purchasing low sodium prepackaged snacks and convenience foods easier. Additionally, the Good Choice list was used in training staff members to purchase and plan menus with low sodium items.

**Conclusions:** Food distributors providing food and beverages to a wide range of food service providers across NYC can put nutrition standards into action by identifying healthier and lower sodium products for their customers. Good Choice presented an exciting tool to make it easier for food service establishments to find healthier foods, with the potential to reach substantial numbers of New Yorkers from disparate populations. Two Good Choice partners—US Foods and Sysco—are the largest food service suppliers in the nation. Other U.S. communities interested in sodium reduction efforts can use the NYC program as a model.

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<sup>1</sup> Angell SY, Yi S, Eisenhower D, Kerker BD, Curtis CJ, Bartley K, et al. Sodium intake in a cross-sectional, representative sample of New York City adults. *Am J Public Health* 2014;104(12):2409–16.

<sup>2</sup> New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Community health survey public use data [online]. 2014. [cited 2016 Dec 15]. Available from URL: [www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/data/data-sets/community-health-survey-public-use-data.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/data/data-sets/community-health-survey-public-use-data.page).