

DNPAO State Program Food Service Guidelines in Worksites Highlights



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state health departments collaborate on a number of areas to prevent and control obesity and other chronic diseases. One of those areas is food service guidelines—standards for the sale and/or provision of food and beverages. These highlights focus on state health departments' coordinated efforts to implement strategies that encourage improved food service guidelines in worksites. Story highlights include efforts around healthier vending, menu labeling programs, and healthier meetings and events.

The states were selected because their efforts include

- **Comprehensive Change**—activities enable the alteration of broader societal trends and support existing or provide more opportunities to improve food service guidelines in worksites.
- **Collaboration**—state health departments played a major role in working with partners or local communities to move activities forward.
- **Significant Reach**—activities have the potential to affect a large proportion of the intended target population.
- **Replicability/transportability**—activities can be duplicated and similar effects be achieved by other similar entities.
- **Potential for sustainability**—activities and effects can endure without continued financial and programmatic investment.

Healthier Foods and Beverages on Government Property in Hawai'i

The Hawai'i Department of Health (HDOH) began building relationships with the state's blind vendors and licensing agency staff around healthier food access in worksites in 2008, paving the way to work more intensively in worksite cafeterias and snack shops 5 years later.

With funding provided through a cooperative agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the HDOH launched the *Choose Healthy Now* Healthy Vending Pilot Project in state and federal agencies in Hawai'i. Working with vendors who volunteered



to participate, the HDOH designed a 12-week pilot that incorporated practices such as improved access, placement, and identification of healthier foods to improve the food and beverage environment at these agencies. Using easy-to-understand traffic-light point of decision prompts to distinguish healthy items from less healthy ones, *Choose Healthy Now*

aims to help customers make informed choices.

The HDOH partnered with the Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Ho'opono Vending Program, which licenses the vendors for all state government vending machines and snack shops. Six vendors representing snack

shops of small, medium, and large operations volunteered to participate in the pilot between May and September of 2014. In preparation for the pilot project, employees were surveyed about their purchasing habits and their interest in having healthy options. The survey revealed that (1) respondents were most often purchasing the least healthy items and (2) a majority of respondents were interested in having healthier options.

Before implementation of *Choose Healthy Now*, the project's registered dietitian developed a rating system based on the *Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations* and the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010*. Snacks and beverages were categorized as green (healthiest), yellow (intermediate), and red (least healthy). A baseline inventory using the rating system found that 7% of items were green, 21% were yellow, and 72% were red. The project team made suggestions to each of the vendors on what items to add based on results of employee survey, but vendors were allowed to make the final decisions. All of the vendors agreed to add at least 5 to 10 new green and yellow products to their inventory, but none of them labeled or restricted their red items during the pilot project. To encourage vendors to add green and yellow items, HDOH staff publicized and hosted a taste test event, giving vendors a chance to gain new customers and increase their business. Vendors were also provided with free incentive items with the *Choose Healthy Now* tagline and logo to give to customers who bought a green item.

Evaluation data showed that on average, vendors increased the



number of green products they were selling by 128% and the number of yellow products by 10%. Exit surveys revealed that 1 in 3 people who saw the green sticker purchased a green item and almost 1 in 4 who saw the yellow sticker purchased a yellow item. These results are promising, although there is room for improvement. Because vendors were not interested in restricting their red items, there was a slight increase (5%) in the average number of red products available from pre to post inventory. The HDOH staff also learned that the coding system they developed for snacks and beverages was too complex. Patterning a system after the U.S. Army's *Go for Green Coding Document*, they have adjusted their system to make it easier to use. The project team also discovered that vendors had difficulty placing the correct stickers on products when restocking shelves. To help vendors, they developed improved signage that included both the sticker color and a description of

products that belonged in each place. The HDOH is also working with local suppliers to address issues with the supply of healthy products, such as limited supply of healthy products, to aid in the sustainability of the project.

The HDOH has worked to address challenges and to expand efforts of the 12-week pilot. All six vendors who committed to the pilot have agreed to continue with the project, and seven more vendors have joined. In addition, one private worksite, Castle Medical Center, has adopted *Choose Healthy Now*. The HDOH will continue to recruit vendors, identify and increase the number of offerings of healthy snacks and beverages, and help other government worksites and private businesses with implementation. An online toolkit will also be developed to give employers access to the marketing materials, criteria for healthy foods and beverages, and model policy for offering healthy foods and beverages in public and private worksites.

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Working with Blind Vendors to Bring Healthier Vending to State Property in Iowa

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) has worked closely with the Iowa Department for the Blind, Business Enterprise Program (BEP), to implement procurement guidelines for vending machines on state property. Working collaboratively for nearly 4 years, the two agencies have reached an agreement to bring healthier foods and beverages to the Capitol Complex, which serves more than 3,700 employees in addition to legislators and guests.

The IDPH started small by working closely with two blind vendors to help them identify and color-code products that met the Nutrition Environment Measures Survey – Vending (NEMS-V) criteria. Products were classified as green (healthiest), yellow (intermediate), and red (least healthy). During this pilot, at least 30% of items offered in vending machines were to meet the NEMS-V criteria, which at the time were based on the Institute of Medicine's *Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools*. The NEMS-V criteria were updated in July 2014 to match the *Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations*.

After these initial efforts, the vendors agreed that providing healthy snacks that met the criteria was a challenge, but substituting healthier products for less healthy ones did not result in loss of revenue. The IDPH then worked with all four vendors in the State Capitol Complex to incorporate the *NEMS-V Mix It Up* campaign, which uses specific messages for different employment sectors to influence employee snack



purchases. Materials included food vending machine signs, beverage vending machine signs, brochures, laminated signs to post throughout the buildings, foam-backed toppers for each snack machine, and yellow and green stickers and product pushers to mark healthy products in all machines. The campaign improved overall sales of healthier foods and beverages. This was demonstrated by higher sales of items marked with *Mix It Up* messaging and NEMS-V labels compared to items with NEMS-V labeling only and items without either NEMS-V labels or marketing messaging.

Incremental changes that increased the availability of healthier options allowed vendors and consumers to slowly adapt to the changes. This, coupled with support from the governor's office for healthier vending efforts, helped the IDPH reach the agreement



they have with the BEP vendors today. This [agreement](#) states that the Department of the Blind will "assist BEP vendors in meeting the goal of providing at least 25% of all packaged food choices that meet NEMS-V criteria and identify them using color-coded product markers and/or other signage and assist BEP vendors in meeting the goal of providing at least 50% of available beverage choices (other than 100% juice and unsweetened milk) that meet NEMS-V criteria and identify them using color-coded product markers and/or other signage." To assist BEP vendors, the IDPH provides signage and helps them identify and mark healthy options with color-coded product markers and/or signage.

Working with four different vendors was not without challenges. When one vendor began to show resistance, the others followed along. It was important for the IDPH to unite the vendors, and the director of the IDPH played a key role in this effort. As a proponent for healthier vending efforts, the IDPH director reached out to the director of the Department for the Blind. This culminated in a partnership that has allowed the vendors to move from piloting these efforts to implementing them. The IDPH hopes to work with additional vendors to spread these efforts to more worksites across the state and share technical assistance and marketing materials with other stakeholders to support healthier vending efforts in Iowa and across the nation.

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Implementing a Healthier Menu Labeling Program in Kentucky State Agencies

The Kentucky Department for Public Health (KDPH) implemented *Better Bites* to bring healthier options to nearly 4,550 state employees and 1,500 daily visitors at three state operated cafeterias. The KDPH Wellness Committee collected worksite assessment data that demonstrated employees wanted healthier, affordable foods in their cafeterias. *Better Bites* is a community-based social marketing program originally developed by the state's Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition. The program has brought healthy, affordable children's menu options to parks, pools, concession stands, and restaurants in Lexington, Kentucky, since 2011. With the support of the Commissioner for Public Health, the KDPH collaborated with the Department of Parks to model the program's success by implementing *Better Bites* healthier menu labeling in state-operated cafeterias.

Better Bites makes dependable, healthy choices more accessible and identifiable through labeling. Each menu item has been crafted by expert chefs, certified by a dietician to meet nutrition standards,



and taste-test approved by KDPH employees. The nutrition standards for each entrée and snack are based on the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010* and the *Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations*. The program encourages consumers to reduce portion sizes to decrease intake of calories, fat, sugar, and sodium.

Better Bites was launched in July 2014 in the largest of the three Frankfort, Kentucky, cafeterias operated by the Department of Parks. Cafeteria staff were trained on how to follow the recipes, serve smaller portions, and promote the *Better Bites* items to customers. The KDPH Wellness Committee promoted *Better Bites* during the first 6 weeks through signage, T shirts, e-mails, raffle incentives, discounted meals, and free samples.

Cafeteria sales overall have grown substantially since *Better Bites* started, and feedback from customers, cafeteria staff, and leadership confirmed that they were not only pleased with the program, but want more *Better Bites* options. Now all three cafeterias offer a *Better Bites* entrée 1 day each week. The KDPH has been monitoring the program continuously. Although cafeteria sales due to

the program have increased, high turnover among cafeteria staff has led to challenges. The KDPH learned that cafeteria staff training must be ongoing to ensure meals are prepared and served in correct portion sizes to meet the guidelines.

The KDPH learned through qualitative analysis that additional recipes and different menu options (such as a grab 'n go sandwiches or salads) will generate continued interest in the *Better Bites* program. Consumers have also said they would like copies of the recipes to cook for their families. With support from the KDPH and the Department of Parks, the *Better Bites* program is continuing to gain momentum, with a presence in all state agency cafeterias and an expansion into 17 state park resorts. The KDPH is expanding menu options and continues to collect sales data to monitor the progress of the program. A report on *Better Bites* menu labeling will soon be available to share with interested stakeholders.



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Improving Nutrition at Rhode Island State Worksites and Beyond

The Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) has long been a leader to increase the consumption of healthy food and beverages in Rhode Island. HEALTH launched statewide nutrition education campaigns, helped limit the amount of unhealthy snacks that children eat at school, and worked with numerous community partners to increase access to locally grown fruits and vegetables. But when HEALTH aimed to make the food and beverages at worksites healthier, it had the unique opportunity to turn inward and establish a model culture that could be replicated by businesses and other organizations throughout the state.

In 2010, HEALTH began discussions with the vendors who operate food service facilities and vending machines at state worksites about offering healthier options. The vendors were reluctant to make changes because they were concerned about lost revenue. However, HEALTH and the vendors were able to agree on some small, initial steps. For example, the



vendors voluntarily added healthier entrées to their cafeteria menus and stocked their machines with only calorie-free beverages and 100% juice.

To address the vendors' concerns about lost revenue, HEALTH conducted an assessment of the food and beverage preferences and buying habits of its employees. The assessment revealed that employees wanted healthier options and that they were not purchasing many items because they were not healthy enough. HEALTH shared these findings with the vendors and offered to provide technical assistance to help them offer and promote healthier options, but vendors made limited changes.

Despite these difficulties, the assessment proved invaluable. It showed that employees not only wanted healthier options from the vendors but also were looking for healthier options at work-sponsored gatherings. With this information, HEALTH focused its efforts on food and beverage guidelines for meetings and events. Given that approximately one-third of the state's 60,000 employees attend meetings where food is served, these guidelines could make a significant impact. Support for the guidelines was strong at the leadership level at HEALTH. A "Healthy Eating at Meetings and Events Policy" was promptly drafted, piloted, and implemented throughout the Department.

HEALTH continued to promote the benefits of the guidelines, both for individuals and for workplaces, throughout state government and to local businesses and organizations through its worksite wellness program. The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and the



Rhode Island Department of Administration soon implemented the guidelines and agreed to help measure their effects. HEALTH developed tools for meeting planners to help departments put the guidelines in place. In addition, HEALTH offered training and technical assistance to educate employees on the new policy. As a result, employees at other departments began to embrace the guidelines, and demand started to grow for healthier options from external food and event vendors that cater state agency meetings. To help these vendors meet this demand, HEALTH developed additional guidelines and tools. HEALTH is continuing to promote the "Healthy Eating at Meetings and Events Policy" to additional organizations and state agencies, and the Director of Health, Michael Fine, M.D., sends the policy to all groups that invite him to speak.

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