

Forming Community Partnerships to Reduce Sodium Intake



Problem

Eating too much sodium can increase a person's blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease and stroke. High sodium intake is a major public health concern in Los Angeles County, particularly in lower income and underserved communities.

Project

In 2010, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) launched an initiative to encourage sodium reduction among consumers and in settings such as schools and government offices.

Outcomes

DPH was successful in working with local government departments and schools to bring healthier and lower sodium food options to multiple sites. The county also created educational materials to increase public awareness about the dangers of sodium.

Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Salt www.cdc.gov/salt
- *Choose Health LA*: Salt www.choosehealthla.com/eat-healthy/salt

**For more information please contact
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

1600 Clifton Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30333

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TTY: 1-888-232-6348

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Statement of Problem: Ninety percent of Americans aged 2 years and older eat too much sodium every day—often more than twice the recommended limit. For Los Angeles County's more than 10 million adults and children, high sodium intake is an important public health issue because it increases the risk of developing high blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease and stroke. Presently, more than 48% of adult Angelenos aged 45 to 64 years and 65% of those aged 65 years and older have high blood pressure. Complications from this health condition account for more than 100,000 hospital admissions each year in this region of California.

Project Description: In 2010, DPH launched the *Choose Health LA* campaign to improve nutrition education and the food environment in several communities in Los Angeles County. DPH promoted changes in food procurement, purchasing, and preparation in schools and food-service operations run by public agencies. Strategies included the adoption and implementation of nutrition standards and gradual sodium reduction.

The campaign was partially supported by the Los Angeles County Sodium Reduction Initiative (LACSRI), a CDC-funded project under the **Sodium Reduction in Communities Program**. LACSRI's goal is to encourage community activities that reduce sodium intake at the individual and organizational levels. The initiative's three-year plan objectives include:

- Implementing strategies and practices to improve food-service venues (e.g., menu labeling, smaller portion sizes, product placement, pricing strategies, and gradual sodium reduction).
- Increasing healthy options on school cafeteria menus.
- Using social media and other communication channels to raise public awareness about sodium.

Outcomes: In its first two years, LACSRI and the *Choose Health LA* campaign made substantive progress toward a number of objectives. The County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors passed a motion that allowed DPH to comment on and recommend healthy food standards for new and renewing food services and vending contracts in county departments that serve or procure food. In most instances, a plan to gradually lower sodium content was included in the request for proposals and in food service and vending contracts for these agencies, including for the Department of Health Services and the Department of Public Works.

DPH also partnered with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest school district in the nation with more than 700 schools and 650,000 students, to create and implement a new menu with healthier offerings. In the 2010–2011 school breakfast menu, the average sodium content per meal easily met the 10-year recommended sodium targets set by the Institute of Medicine.

To increase public awareness of the importance of sodium reduction, DPH developed the "Salt Shockers" video series, which has reached thousands of online viewers and received 5 national awards for its innovative messaging. In addition to posting the series on the *Choose Health LA* website, DPH promoted the videos through Facebook and Twitter. The series has drawn local and national attention from several major news outlets, including the *Los Angeles Times*.

Conclusions: LACSRI has demonstrated how sodium reduction strategies can help improve the food environment and the overall health of county residents. Future efforts, including the expansion of healthy procurement practices, are expected to result in further improvements in sodium reduction across Los Angeles County and the nation.