

Best choice



Choose carefully



Limit



Introduction of Healthy Choices at Alfred Health

Prepared for VicHealth – Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Background

There is increasing consensus that improving food environments is a critical strategy in the betterment of population health through improved nutrition and decreased obesity. However, there has been little work to date to synthesise the opportunities provided by food outlets, to evaluate their effects on population health, or to understand their impact on the food outlet itself. In 2012 a large Victorian metropolitan health service introduced a healthy food and beverage policy based on state government guidelines (Healthy Choices, Food and Drink Guidelines for Victorian Public Hospitals). In this report we capitalise on the opportunity provided by this policy initiative to better understand the process, risks and benefits of its implementation from the perspective of the individuals and organisations involved in the implementation.

Approach

The introduction of a Healthy Choices policy by Alfred Health covered onsite snack and beverage vending machines, food outlets within health service grounds, and the catering purchased by the health service across more than three different sites. This report is focussed on the changes made to retail and vending at the largest site. We used a mixed methods approach, involving key informant interviews of eight interviewees, each involved in a different aspect of policy implementation. We also analysed the changes in sales of food and beverages across all vending machines before and after implementation of the policy. We are grateful for the extensive input from all those interviewed.

Key findings

There was a high degree of consistency of messages across all those interviewed. A number of factors were identified across those interviewed that were perceived to have been important in the successful implementation of the changes. These included: taking a long term perspective with ongoing support and resourcing; the development and management of the multiple stakeholder relationships; and the use of consistent messages regarding why the policy was being introduced between all the various stakeholders.

Some novel aspects of the approach emerged including: engagement of retailers in the creation of policy solutions, including beginning with short term trials with rapid, iterative feedback; the dedication of resources to support a dietitian to guide the specific changes in retail and vending; and the importance of considering customer satisfaction iteratively throughout the change process.

The policy changes were identified as successfully achieving their public health outcomes. There was clearly articulated success of a number of strategies used by the café style food outlets, with high customer satisfaction and satisfactory sales for new healthy items like salads, sushi and smaller muffins, as opposed to only consuming reformulated foods. In addition, our analysis of vending demonstrated that changes to the vending machine display led to large shifts from unhealthy to healthier food and drink purchases.

In terms of the 'business case', there was a high degree of consistency across interviewees of a perception of financial risk at the beginning of the process which over time changed to a robust confidence in the approach. All stakeholders felt the overall business case for change was satisfactory, and that it included a range of elements such as financial return, customer satisfaction, branding and recognition. In terms of financial return the combination of identifying attractive healthy options and

creative contract negotiations was identified as key for both café style food outlets and vending. In this setting, the changes to vending machine display led to a moderate decrease in items sold, but from the health service's perspective this was compensated for by a coincident renegotiation of commission rates by the health service.

This project clearly identified the importance of recognising the multiple motivators (Table A), identified by the different interviewees, for participation and continuation with this policy implementation. We observed those involved in the retail outlets identify a wide range of benefits stemming from the changes, ranging from population health through organisational leadership through customer satisfaction to personal pride, satisfaction and knowledge.

Recommendations

From this project it emerged that it will be critical in future to build the body of work in this area, to identify the range of different motivators across stakeholders, to build the measurement tools and systems for the wide range of elements relevant to the different stakeholders and to enhance communication across different organisations both of what works and the broad range of outcomes that are associated with implementation of healthy food policies such as Healthy Choices.

A number of specific recommendations emerged regarding organisational enablers and practical strategies that can be employed by an organisation or a food retail outlet to support successful implementation of healthy food policies such as Healthy Choices.

Organisational recommendations:

1. Develop and communicate clear leadership messages that put the value of health and profit in context and can be communicated to all stakeholders regarding the rationale and role of the policy.
2. Develop and communicate clear leadership messages that recognise policy implementation is a long term process requiring patience, feedback, and trial and error.
3. Identify the range of people potentially involved in the implementation of the policy so that multiple strategic relationships can be developed.
4. Assign resources, either internal or external, to the policy implementation to support identification, development and procurement of healthier options. Specifically, the ongoing and timely access to a dietitian (internal or external to the organisation).
5. Support an iterative feedback loop of auditing and reporting of health and retailer relevant information.
6. Make use of contract re-negotiations with both retailers and suppliers to improve healthiness of options and maintain financial return.
7. Identify external recognition options to further support and inspire those involved in making the changes, including organisational letters of support, and public recognition awards.

Food retail outlet strategies:

1. Develop expert supports or networks to identify good alternative 'green' and 'amber' products to replace current 'red' varieties. Specific opportunities include:
 - a. Develop networks of retailers/organisations to share the range of strategies that have led to sales of healthier food and drink without compromising sales (see Table 6 for specific examples from this context).

- b. Identify further learnings from already implemented policies and strategies, such as the Alfred Hospital's 'red' drinks off display, to identify the top selling 'green' and 'amber' alternative drinks. This appears particularly important for vending, therefore we also recommend continued conversations with the vending machine supplier to identify new opportunities to source different 'green' items, and new vending machine designs where products can be refrigerated.
 - c. Development/ sharing of a recipe book or online resource to assist in identification of healthy, tasty substitution options.
2. Use small, reversible, short term, trails, with the involvement of the retailer in the design, development and ongoing monitoring.

Conclusion

In this mixed method analysis of the implementation of the Victorian government Healthy Choices guidelines across a major health service, we identified a number of recommendations to support successful implementation of such policies. These recommendations pertain both to the organisational approach and practical strategies for consideration by those involved in food procurement and retail.

We recommend broad consideration of these recommendations by other stakeholders alongside the continuous building of this evidence base, capitalising on the increasing implementation of healthy food policies across Victoria.

Table A: Multiple different stakeholder motivators for participation and continuation in the policy implementation were identified.

Aim of action	Strategy
Decrease portion sizes	Removing largest takeaway food container size Changing cake slices to petit fours
Increasing range and quality of healthy foods	Variety of salads with varied ingredients Rotate salads regularly (different salads on different days) Changing sushi and rice paper roll supplier to improve quality Higher quality yoghurt
Reducing amount of unhealthy food available	Minimise fried food availability
Placement of unhealthy items away from customers	Moving sugar sweetened beverages out of customer eyesight Move fried foods away from main areas
Pricing healthy foods lower	Matching the price of a yoghurt cup to a cake slice Selling the salads cheaper at the end of the day
Changes to bundling options to encourage smaller portion	Exchanging the small muffin for the big muffin in the 'coffee and muffin' deal
Options for direct substitutes between healthy and unhealthy items	Mineral water instead of sugar sweetened beverages Yoghurt instead of cakes (as above)

Table B: Specific food retailer actions and strategies identified as contributing to the implementation of a successful business case for healthy food retail.

Stakeholder	Motivators
General	Feeding off others passion Contributing to preventive health
CEO and organisation	Good use of public money Leading the way
Food outlet owner	Creating a point of difference Balancing between sales and healthy food provision Good relationship with health service Financial viability Satisfying customers Ownership of changes
Head chef	Satisfying customers Doing a good job Leading the way
External supplier	Good relationship with food outlet owner