

Implementing Healthier Vending Options

Hospitals represent unique work environments, as many staff members work lengthy shifts, often spanning the late and overnight hours when kitchens and cafeterias already have closed for the day. As a result, vending machines too often are the source for meals, snacks and beverages for many hospital workers and guests on a daily basis. However, food items found in vending areas do not have to be dominated by processed food options and beverage products typically high in calories, salt and sugar. Improvement of the nutritional quality for vending machine selections is an important component to creating a healthier workplace environment.

Well-drafted food vending and/or procurement policies usually include the following components, which are addressed individually below:

- Statement of purpose;
- Scope of the policy;
- Implementation provisions;
- Enforcement provisions;
- Evaluation provisions;
- Provisions addressing the “4Ps” of marketing: product, pricing, placement and promotion; and
- Evidence-based nutrition standards.

Statement of Purpose

Setting out clear goals for the policy identifies what the hospital intends to achieve. Understanding of the purpose is critical to applying the policy to actions and decision-making.

The written policy facilitates its consistent implementation, and can be used to raise awareness and educate all stakeholders. Written policies provide consistency as changes in organizational leadership or priorities occur.

The Healthy Kansas Hospital initiative has created a Model Policy Template that can be found in this toolkit or online at HealthyKansasHospitals.org.

Scope

The policy should specify exactly what is covered. Does the policy apply only to venues open to the “public,” such as the cafeteria, snack bar and vending machines? Are catered events included? Does the policy apply to functions for specific groups, such as the medical staff or governing board? Does the policy apply to off-campus hospital-sponsored events?

Ideally, the policy should cover all the ways that food and beverages are purchased, sold or provided by the hospital or within its property, as well as at sponsored events or meetings whether they are on-site or off-site. Any exceptions should be as narrow as possible and carefully thought out so that the exceptions do not undermine the policy’s credibility and effectiveness.

Tip:

Incorporate the policy into requests for bids and vendor contracts. Terms of contracts are legally binding on the hospital and its vendors, so be sure that the hospital’s food and beverage policies are reflected in all vendor contracts.

Ideally, the same or similar standards should be applied across all outlets, including cafeterias, catered meetings and vending machines, but sometimes nutrition standards must be tailored to fit a specific situation. For example, it may be easier to offer low-sodium dishes in the cafeteria than to find a wide selection of low-sodium packaged foods for vending machines.

While good nutrition standards are based on scientific evidence, they also must be attainable. Some things to consider in establishing your hospital’s nutrition standards include:

What products are available? How many meet the nutrition standards you are considering?

- Do current vendors use some form of nutrition standards?
- Will all food and beverage options be required to meet the nutrition standards? Consider setting a percentage, such as 75 percent or 50 percent. The percentage might vary depending on the type of outlet or product.
- What process will be used to update nutrition standards over time?
- How will you ensure that standards are being followed?

Implementation

The hospital’s vending and/or procurement policy should state how implementation will occur, including dates and responsible individual. Existing food and beverage contracts may dictate the timeframe for implementing a new policy, depending on when contracts expire and if changes in product specifications are allowed. Some vendors may be willing to phase-in healthier options under existing contracts. When the hospital solicits bids from vendors, be sure that the request for proposals incorporates the new policy. Additionally, be sure that all new contracts include the provisions stated in the policy, and amend existing contracts as feasible. While the hospital may have a policy for certain nutritional standards, vendors are bound only by what is stated in the contract.

Tip:

Be sure to factor in adequate time for vendors to transition their products and make customers aware of changes. Use pricing, product placement and promotional materials to enhance healthier products.

Enforcement

The hospital’s food and beverage policies should explain how they are to be enforced, including identification of the specific department or position responsible for enforcement. Ways to verify compliance with the policies likely will include record-keeping as well as reporting requirements for vendors. To ensure vendor cooperation and compliance, it is prudent to incorporate enforcement provisions/requirements into contracts and to address potential compliance problems, including the consequences for non-compliance.

Evaluation

Having baseline data against which to measure the success of implementing healthier vending and/or procurement policies is critical. An assessment of the current food and beverage environment in the hospital before policy changes are made is a good starting point. Assessments may collect information on the following:

- Choices being offered in different types of food outlets and their pricing;
- Distribution of food and beverages as well as other options;
- Requirements of existing contracts, their expiration or renewal dates and any options for product additions/changes; and
- Preferences and perceptions of employees, visitors, staff and patients regarding existing and/or potential product choices and their receptivity to healthier options.

Information gained through an assessment may be helpful in educational messages about why policies are being changed.

For example, find out how many pounds of sugar are contained in sugary beverages sold to employees and visitors. A message, such as “Did you know that ABC Hospital sold more than 20,000 pounds of sugar in its beverage vending machines last year” could help persuade individuals to make healthier beverage choices.

Ways to evaluate success of vending and/or procurement policies:

- Are vendors supplying the food and beverage products per their contracts?
- Is the hospital following its policy in its food and beverage purchasing decisions?
- How have purchasing patterns changed across or between the various food and beverage outlets?
- Do staff and community members show increased understanding of healthier food and beverage choices?
- Do staff and community members know whom to go to with questions about the policy?
- Have attitudes about healthier food and beverage choices changed?

Evaluation will demonstrate if policy goals are being achieved and behavior changes are occurring. For example, reports on vending sales may document changes in behavior to choose more healthy foods and beverages. Progress reports should be shared with upper management, and the hospital should inform patients, visitors, staff, employees and the community about successes.

Addressing the 4Ps of Marketing

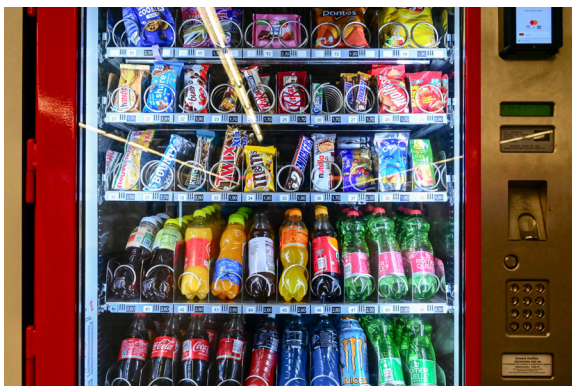
Regardless of their nutritional status, foods and beverages are marketed based on the product, its price, its placement and promotion. Applying the four Ps of marketing is even more important to encourage individuals to purchase healthier foods and beverages that offer nutritional value. In addition, consider the following:

The 4Ps: Product, Pricing, Placement and Promotion	
Concept	Strategy
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a range of product offerings that meet the nutrition standards so that customers have several products to choose from • Reduce access to products that don’t meet the standards by reducing or eliminating their availability • Offer healthier portion sizes • Increase access to drinking water
Pricing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the products that meet the nutrition standards are affordable • Increase prices for products that don’t meet standards, and/or lower prices of products that do meet standards • Offer discounts and promotions on products that meet the nutrition standards
Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put the products that meet the nutrition standards in places that are easy to see and easy to grab - such as checkout lanes, at eye-level on shelves and in vending machines, in slots by the selection buttons in machines • Re-arrange beverage cooler plan-a-grams to give favorable placement to beverages that meet the nutrition standards
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use signs, shelf tags and other educational materials to draw attention to products that meet nutritional standards • Provide free taste tests and sampling opportunities to build customer awareness and appreciation for new products that meet the nutritional standards • Ask or require vendors through their contracts to remove advertisements for products that don’t meet the standards, including on vending machine facades, or only allow advertisements for products that meet the standards

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Tips for Healthy Vending

- Choose the right vending partner. You deserve to receive good customer service from your business partner. Consider how well the vendor responds to problems and concerns, as well as whether the company understands your needs as a health care provider.
- Place healthier foods in vending machines at eye level or identify the healthier selections with stickers to make them more visible and to increase purchase/consumption.
- For food items, only offer items that are 200 calories or less with no more than 240 milligrams of sodium per package. For beverages, milk should be fat-free or low-fat and less than 200 calories per container. Only offer 100 percent fruit and vegetable juices of no more than 6-8 ounces in size.
- Select the smallest package sizes offered by your vendor.
- Reduce all candy, regular chips, desserts and sweet baked items, and sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Post calorie and sodium content for all items on or near the machine.
- Sell healthier items at discounted prices.
- Choose popular products.



Area Vendors Who Can Assist With Healthy Vending

Treat America Food Services offers comprehensive, customized food service solutions tailored to the needs of each individual client. The company provides full service vending programs at health care facilities and other businesses throughout the Midwest, offering hundreds of quality, name-brand snacks, a wide assortment of beverages and a variety of nutritionally sensitive selections.



Treat America
FOOD SERVICES

Snacks on Racks is a one-stop vendor that offers healthier eating choices to compete with the “candy bar” around-the-clock. Its “Doctor’s Lounge” offers a variety of healthy snacks that appeal to physicians. The company’s vending program offers many choices, including:

- Peg bags and gourmet snack packs;
- Gluten-free, sugar-free and nut-free items;
- Certified organic and all-natural products;
- Vegan, kosher and halal allowed
- choices;
- No sodium/low sodium products; and
- No Trans fat, fat-free and lowcarbohydrate options.



To learn more about ordering healthy vending items, contact Traci Parsons at APS at (913) 327-8730.

The Kansas Hospital Association and Healthworks have created a series of resources designed to inform and support efforts to promote healthy food and beverage environments in Kansas hospitals. The Public Health Law Center assisted in creating this document. These resources are funded in part by the Kansas Health Foundation. For more information, visit www.HealthyKansasHospitals.org.

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