

# IMPROVING WELLBEING THROUGH HEALTHY EATING IN OUR HOSPITALS

District health boards (DHBs) are taking a leadership role to showcase and make healthy food options more accessible for staff, visitors and the community. In May 2015, the three DHBs in the Wellington region (Capital and Coast, Hutt Valley and Wairarapa) adopted the 'healthy food environment guidelines' to increase the availability of healthy foods and beverages in hospital vending machines, shops and cafes.

Wairarapa, Hutt Valley and Capital & Coast DHBs

## Making healthy choices the easy choice!

Yippee!

I can dig it

I can dig it

Wairarapa, Hutt Valley and Capital & Coast DHBs will over the next 18 months introduce new food and beverage guidelines that make healthy options more prominent in our cafes, vending machines and shops.

This means healthier options, containing more wholegrains, fruits, vegetables and water and less sugar, salt and fat available - all aimed at making healthy choices the easy choice.

Wairarapa | Hutt Valley | Capital & Coast  
DISTRICT HEALTH BOARDS

Promoting the healthy changes to staff, patients and visitors

## DHB food and beverage guidelines

The criteria used aligns with the Auckland DHB's policy and are increasingly being adopted by other hospitals nationally. Five main criteria underpin the healthy food and beverage environment guidelines to support staff and visitors to make healthy food choices. The guidelines make water, fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and foods with minimal saturated fat, salt and sugar readily available. While the availability of high energy and less nutrient dense foods such as, sweet drinks, confectionary and fried foods will be reduced and offered in smaller portions sizes.

## Getting buy-in

Gaining management and high level 'buy-in' such as board level, is key to successfully engaging your DHB, public facility

or workplace in changing the food environment. This will make it easier to engage with food providers and other stakeholders to implement change. In this example, Regional Public Health's (RPH) nutrition and physical activity team developed a background paper to achieve our DHB's commitment at a board meeting.

The paper included a range of evidence to support the recommendation to adopt and implement the food policy such as regional obesity statistics, causes of obesity and poor nutrition, effective strategies to prevent obesity, and the role of the organisation in obesity prevention.

The team also engaged 'champions' to form a stakeholder group to help with 'buy-in' for the guidelines from an early stage. The group included management, food services and providers, union representatives, procurement, health and wellness staff, human resources, communications and other interested staff. Note that all food providers and stakeholders had the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed changes.

## Key learning's for implementation

- Since adoption, DHB's in the Wellington region have opted to gradually phase in the food policy over eighteen months.
- Incremental change with a focus on improving the nutrition profile and portion size of foods sold in the highest volumes, is likely to provide the biggest impact.
- Our stakeholder group continues to regularly work with food service operators to support details of the guidelines to be successfully embedded.

## To ensure sustainability of implementation:

- A formal implementation plan (what needs to be done, when and by who) is guiding the process.
- A communications plan is being implemented. The DHBs have used posters and the intranet to communicate with staff and visitors; an electronic newsletter and one-to-one meetings with food service vendors; and a generic email address provides an easy way for all stakeholders to feedback to the implementation group.
- Ways to monitor and evaluate the changes to support stakeholder engagement and on-going expansion of healthier food into other sectors are continuing to be explored for future implementation.

Despite concerns, promoting healthier food availability can drive demand and profitability as seen in this **Dunedin school canteen**.

A new national DHB network is also currently exploring the development of best practice food guidelines that align with guidelines of the Ministry of Health and Heart Foundation. These will be able to be used by a range of sectors such as hospitals, public facilities and workplaces to support nationally consistent messaging for both food and beverage providers and suppliers.

For further queries please contact:

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**RPH Healthy Food Environments**