

Advancing Sodium and Sugar Reduction through Partnerships with the Food Industry

This document provides background information about ASTHO's sodium and sugar reduction virtual learning community, the activities of each participating state, results of surveys and interviews conducted with state health agency staff, and resources on sodium and sugar reduction and food industry partnerships.

Background

From July 2016 to June 2017, ASTHO and the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) hosted [Advancing Sodium and Sugar Reduction Through Partnerships](#), a virtual learning community focused on increasing the uptake of sodium and sugar reduction strategies among the food service sector, state government leadership, and state and territorial public health practitioners. As food service management companies (FSMCs) serve millions of meals each day across multiple institutions and sites in the United States, they play a major role in determining what is available for Americans to consume daily. Therefore, the primary objectives of this learning community were to explore ways for state health agencies to improve the nutritional quality of foods and beverages through successful and effective partnerships with the food industry, blind vendors who are authorized by the Randolph-Sheppard Act¹ to operate vending facilities on federal and other property, and other state agencies that have a role in purchasing food.

During the project year, ASTHO held several virtual learning sessions, during which representatives from state health departments discussed their current work, shared partnership successes and challenges, reviewed and developed policy language, and consulted food industry partners about ways to offer healthier foods in their facilities. During a national webinar, participants heard from the Connecticut Department of Public Health and the Connecticut Bureau for Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) on partnerships with blind vendors as a strategy to provide healthier vending options. The final project technical assistance webinar underscored the lessons learned from state public health departments working with other state agencies, demonstrating ways to ensure healthy food options are available and the benefits of coordinating with FSMCs to create a variety of options for these venues.

Prior to this learning community, ASTHO interviewed three FSMCs—Sodexo, Aramark, and Compass Group—to learn about their approaches to health and nutrition, procuring healthy foods, developing nutritious menus, and satisfying clients and customers. To further learn how health agencies work with FSMCs, either directly or through partner agencies, NACDD surveyed state chronic disease units and interviewed teams from nutrition and physical activity, worksite wellness, cardiovascular health, and school health programs. Visit ASTHO's [sodium and sugar reduction web page](#) for information about the themes emerging from those surveys and case studies from the responding states (many of which then joined this learning community).

State Case Studies

Five states participated in this virtual learning community: California, Colorado, Iowa, Hawaii, and Washington. ASTHO's virtual learning community model provides a space for state health agency program staff and their partners to interface with their peers, receive customized technical assistance from ASTHO staff, and explore new ways to engage existing and new partners in their state-level public

health efforts. The learning community model is a catalyst for disseminating new ideas to tackle common public health challenges and generating new resources to support other states in implementing similar interventions to address those challenges. In selecting the states for this learning community, ASTHO considered those that have passed or tried to pass policies (through legislation, statute, regulation, or executive order) to increase the availability of healthy options with reduced sodium and sugar content; states that responded to NACDD's *Survey of Chronic Disease Directors* indicating partnerships; and states that participated in the ASTHO virtual roundtable discussions, showing an invested interest in this topic and a willingness to share lessons learned. ASTHO was mindful of geographic and population diversity.

California

The California Department of Public Health's (CDPH) 2008 [executive order](#) regulates various aspects of food and beverages, including nutrition standards, in vending machines in state buildings. Through CDC's 1305 funding program, CDPH is providing assistance to support compliance of these standards at vending machines within CDPH, the Department of Health Care Services, and the California Department of Education, since they are housed in the same building complex. Much of the initial effort of this work was establishing relationships with the departments and programs to help facilitate educational opportunities. CDPH worked with the California Department of Rehabilitation, which has the legal authority over vendors and runs the Blind Enterprise Program. This partnership development began in 2014 when staff from both departments attended a training together, but it took about a year to operationalize the relationship.

CDPH is currently working with a vendor for five buildings in the state capital area. Before engaging the vendor, health department staff worked with dietetic students to assess the compliance of food and beverage vending machines, and then provided product recommendations to help improve compliance. In discussions with the current vendor, it was noted that most items stocked in the machines were from Costco or Sam's Club, and, as a result, any substitution recommendations would need to be in stock at these two stores.

Lessons Learned:

- Improving vending is a lengthy process; be patient and consistent.
- Do your homework; find out who is responsible for vendor selection and oversight, and how that process works in your state.
- Partner; look for opportunities to connect with a champion or others who have influence or authority over vendors.

Colorado

Colorado is well recognized for its statewide initiative, the [Colorado Healthy Hospital Compact](#). The state is working with hospital food service directors to implement measures designed to improve the quality of their nutrition environments. With executive leadership support, hospitals agree to meet food and beverage standards—which include sodium and sugar—and to adopt and implement breastfeeding standards and practices. The Compact resulted from a CDC-funded (1305 grant) collaborative effort led by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and involved local health departments, Kaiser Permanente, hospital dietitians, community engagement organizations, and other stakeholders. Many of the hospitals were already engaged in this work through [Let's Move](#), which was working with hospitals through an initiative run by the Partnership for a Healthy America. Large food

service providers like Sodexo were also supporting this work and branding their own products that often aligned with Compact standards. In addition, hospitals were excited to be recognized for joining a statewide movement to create healthier food and beverage environments in their institutions.

Colorado hospitals entering the Compact commit to implementing at least one and up to four programs to achieve bronze, silver, gold or platinum status. The four programs are:

- Healthier Food Program: meets Compact nutrition guidelines which include sodium and sugar.
- Healthier Beverage Program: reduces sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Marketing Program: promotes and incentivizes the purchase of healthier foods and beverages.
- Breastfeeding Policy and Support Program: implements healthy breastfeeding policies and practices.

In addition, CDPHE has a healthy vending and concession initiative in state-run buildings. The initial goals of this initiative were that 50 percent of the beverages and 25 percent of snack vending meet healthy guidelines at all 19 state agencies, in alignment with the [Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations](#). After completing an assessment, CDPH found that only six out of 19 agencies were compliant for beverages, and 14 out of 19 were compliant for snacks. To implement the healthy vending and concession initiative, CDPHE collaborated with the Business Enterprise Program and with Canteen Vending, a part of Compass Group. CDPHE conducted the assessment with the help of Canteen employees and a dietetics intern using CDPHE-created forms, but identifying updated beverage and snack vending items with nutrition information remained a challenge.

Lessons Learned:

- Hospitals were willing to engage in this type of intervention with food service facilities.
- If possible, include language that holds the contractor responsible for compliance, and include penalties or other ramifications for noncompliance.

Hawaii

The Hawaii State Department of Health (HSDH)'s [Choose Healthy Now](#) healthy vending project aims to increase awareness, availability, and sales of healthier foods and beverages. It started in snack shops in government buildings, and expanded to hospital cafeterias, convenience stores, and grocery stores. By using point-of-decision prompts, product placement, and pricing strategies, it encourages people to choose healthier snacks and drinks. HSDH is planning a large Choose Healthy Now media campaign including TV commercials, radio and mall ads, and local news station interviews. This media campaign aims to raise awareness of the program, bring attention to the Choose Healthy Now locations, and encourage healthy purchases.

The Hawaii Division of Vocational Rehabilitation under the Department of Human Services is a statewide resource for people with disabilities seeking employment. Ho'opono [HO-O-po-no] blind vendors operate snack shops in county, state, and federal buildings (about 44 shops), and are covered by the Randolph-Sheppard Act. HSDH is currently working with 21 vendors who participate in the Choose Healthy Now program to provide healthier food and beverage options in federal, state, county, and military buildings.

HSDH is also partnering with 7-Eleven, which has 65 stores across the state, to launch the Choose Healthy Now program to promote and expand healthy options. This partnership with 7-Eleven will expand the statewide reach that was originally achieved with Aloha Island Marts convenience stores in 45 locations across the state, and KTA Grocery Stores with six locations on the Big Island. All of the partnerships came about when Hawaii Public Health Institute coalitions reached out to businesses to present the opportunity for collaboration. Businesses were approached with a proposal to work together to increase the number and visibility of healthier options in stores and snack shops. Aloha Island Marts chose to participate early on in the project because their company culture was very supportive of health. Being able to use the Choose Healthy Now materials with the HSDH logo and to participate in the media campaign have been important selling points with participating businesses.

Lessons Learned:

- It is time-intensive to build relationships and ensure proper implementation.
- The Business Enterprise Program was willing to work with HSDH rather than having legislation passed.
- Create resources for vendors.
- Highlight top products sold at Costco/Sam's Club, i.e., a short list of 20-25 healthy products (not a list of 200 products) and use pictures.

Iowa

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) is partnering with the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), which oversees food procurement for the state. This relationship builds upon work that was underway through the IDPH Sodium Reduction Task Force, which was active from 2011 to 2013. The task force conducted an environmental assessment of nutrition standards including sodium, established a framework of goals and objectives for improving the sodium reduction environment in Iowa, and educated policymakers on the need for sodium reduction efforts. IDPH and DAS are now partnering to support a new food service company which will oversee food purchasing in the building where the health department is located. This effort received a lot of support from Iowa's director of public health, which helped move things forward. He held meetings with other leadership, such as the bureau chief and division director at DAS, and the lieutenant governor to discuss nutrition and physical activity. The IDPH director contacted and met with agency directors to have the health department represented on appropriate committees such as the food service committee for the IDPH building and the Farmers Market Committee, which oversees a farmer's market at the Capitol Complex. Serving on the food service committee for the IDPH building resulted in the inclusion of food variety, nutrition standards, and sustainability language in the request for proposal and contract performance measures.

In 2015, IDPH signed a memorandum with the Iowa Department for the Blind's Business Enterprise Program to provide healthy options in vending machines in state-owned and operated buildings. IDPH conducted a training in October 2016 to support compliance with calorie labeling. The memorandum was renewed in April 2017. Signage and updated healthy food and beverage resources will be provided at the Statewide Business Enterprise Program Vendors' Meeting in October 2017.

Lessons Learned:

- Gain leadership support and highlight their role in engaging other agency leaders.
- Build trust with partners and understand the needs of other agencies.
- Serve on procurement teams and help them come up with strategies to meet common needs.

Washington

In 2013, Gov. Jay Inslee signed [Executive Order 13-06](#) requiring state executive agencies to implement the [Healthy Nutrition Guidelines](#) created by a food procurement workgroup at the Washington State Department of Health (DOH). Washington worked with vending, cafeterias, micro markets, institutional food service, and food service distributors. The state also worked with Costco on highlighting foods that meet Smart Snacks criteria and with distributors that use Costco to stock vending machines.

Washington state also works with the Department of Corrections and its 12 prisons to pick 10 commissary items that meet lower sodium and nutrition guidelines to help them comply with the executive order. In addition, medical staff at the prisons distribute talking points and information to inmates about diabetes and hypertension to help them identify appropriate commissary items.

DOH also launched a program, [Complete Eats](#), with Safeway to assist families on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). At 150 Safeway stores in Washington state, SNAP participants that spend \$10 on fruits or vegetables receive a \$5 coupon. This program launched in June 2017 and is anticipated to run for two years, as part of USDA's [Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program](#).

DOH partners with several other government agencies, either directly or indirectly. The department works with the state procurement agency (Department of Enterprise Services), the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Ecology to draft nutrition and sustainability language that was included in a multimillion-dollar State Food RFP. DOH also works with the Office of Financial Management, which oversees a yearly inventory report. DOH receives information from them about the number of buildings the state operates and they have robust information about inventory from each facility, including wellness rooms, lactation rooms, and vending machines. This is extremely helpful in identifying vending machines that meet the nutrition standards.

Lessons Learned:

- It can be difficult to implement an executive order. Ensure that implementation and enforcement language is clear.
- Work with various state agencies (e.g., DoT, DoD, etc.) to understand their scope and how they can improve compliance.
- Public health can play a role in helping vendors understand behavioral economics and to better analyze their projected gains and losses when selling healthier food.

Working with Partners: Challenges and Opportunities

As part of the learning community, participating states were asked about challenges they have experienced in working with vendors to improve the nutritional quality of foods offered:

- Many vendors are small, independent business operators with limited purchasing power, and the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) can only make recommendations about nutrition standards.
- Without appropriate language in contracts, ongoing monitoring of compliance can be difficult. Therefore, adding nutrition standards and guidelines into the contracts can help with compliance.
- Some vendors determine what is healthy based on food industry marketing, and are not labeling healthy foods correctly. This is an opportunity for Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) staff to collaborate with vendors and BEP to provide guidance on nutrition quality.
- There is a lack of quality sales data, which makes it difficult to track program success.
- Price, distribution, and perception of additional work is a challenge for vendors.
- The cost of healthier pre-packaged food can be a barrier, along with identifying locally grown food available through food distributors. Interns can be great resources in helping identify those local food distributors, and making lists of healthy food items directly from the wholesaler's inventory to help provide guidance to the vendors.
- Vendors do not recognize that current customers purchase cheap and unhealthy foods because that is what is available, as opposed to reaching out to a new customer base that may want healthier options.

States were also asked about keys to effectively partnering with vendors to improve the nutritional quality of foods offered:

- Invite vendors to the table to be part of the discussion.
- Identify healthy products on distributor product listings and physically help them mark the products.
- Direct vendors where to purchase healthy items; learn which healthy items sell well, and in what venue; and highlight nationwide consistent demand for healthier products.
- Train vendors on customer service to encourage new, healthy options, signage, and ways to leverage large buying power.
- Work with food service management and procurement staff to identify which healthier products they are willing to pay more for.

Resources

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)

- [Leadership's Role in Supporting Efforts to Reduce Sodium and Added Sugar: Interviews with State Health Agency Senior Deputies](#)
- [Healthy Eating in Connecticut](#)
- [Food Service Management Company Insights and Opportunities to Improve Nutrition in the Food Supply](#)
- [Working with Food Service Management Companies to Improve Healthy Food Offerings: Considerations for State Public Health Agencies](#)
- Industry Snapshots: Reducing Sodium and Added Sugars at Leading Academic Institutions and FSMCs

- [Harvard University Dining Services](#)
- [Selrico](#)
- [Sodexo](#)

National Networks of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI)

Visit <http://www.nnphi.org/sodium> to access sodium reduction videos and toolkit.

American Heart Association (AHA)

[Food Service Guideline Policies on State Government-Controlled Properties](#): this state-level analysis looked at food service guidelines and focused on bills (proposed and adopted,) statutes, regulations, and executive orders proposed or passed by December 31, 2014.

Public Health Law Center

[Key Components of Food Procurement and Vending Policies](#). Additional resources at <http://www.publichealthlawcenter.org>

CDC

- [CDC's Healthy Food Service Guidelines](#)
- [CDC's Prevention Status Reports](#)
- [Know Your Limit for Added Sugars](#)
- [Plain Water, the Healthier Choice](#)
- [Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Data](#)
- [Food Service Guidelines: Case Studies from States and Communities](#)

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¹ National Federation of the Blind. "The Randolph-Sheppard Act: Vending Facilities for the Blind in Federal Buildings." Available at <http://blindmerchants.org/randolph-sheppard-act/randolph-sheppard-act/>. Accessed 9-5-2017.