



PROVIDING HEALTHY FOOD IN INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS



Food and drinks high in sugar, calories, and salt can cause chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure. A crucial step in reducing these diet-related diseases, and obesity too, is creating food environments that support healthy choices.

In Kansas, governments serve thousands of community members in institutional settings, providing them an important opportunity to promote healthy options.

Policies enacting food and beverage service standards in government-run institutions are important to the public health of Kansas because they encourage access to healthy and nutritious foods for Kansas's institutionalized population. Institutional feeding applies to the feeding of custodial or institutionalized populations under the care of the government. Institutional feeding happens in juvenile justice facilities, public



hospitals, long-term or short-term care facilities, and correctional facilities. Providing these populations healthy foods can improve health and quality of life, as well as reducing health care costs long-term.

There are several important components to consider when developing an institutional feeding policy. These components can have a significant impact on the implementation and effectiveness of the policy, so they should be carefully considered and tailored to your community and the particular institutional setting. You will need to answer the following questions:

- What facilities are you working to impact, and what type of policy is needed to impact that facility?
- Which stakeholders need to be involved to make the changes to the policy and implement the new nutrition standards?
- What nutrition standards apply and when should those standards go into effect?

Conduct an assessment

Start with conducting an assessment of what is currently going on in the institutional setting you are looking to impact. Ask your local government officials which types of settings are under their control and how the food is provided in those settings. For this assessment you will want to get information about the types of facilities, the contracts or agreements that are currently in place with vendors (if applicable), and any nutrition standards that are currently enforced. You will also want to collect information specific to the food and beverages currently being offered through institutional feeding operations, the types of healthier options available, and their prices.

Communicate with relevant stakeholders

Once you have identified the type of facilities and the type of policy needed to influence the food environment, it is critical for you to reach out to relevant stakeholders. This includes those running the operation, providing the food, and eating the food. In some cases, it will be important to work with community groups that serve particular populations or those formally in the institutional settings. For example, it may be difficult to identify and work with stakeholders in a juvenile justice facility. But it may be easier to work with a community group that works with youth involved in the juvenile justice system or a person who had been institutionalized in a juvenile justice facility.

Select nutrition standards

There are several nutrition standards that can be used to develop a specific policy. The American Heart Association standards, the Health and Human Services guidelines, the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act guidelines, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program guidelines are all acceptable to ensure adequate nutrition in institutional feeding contexts.

Next Steps

Every locality is unique. Local governments across the United States and Kansas recognize the impact food has on public well-being and the local economy. Local governments play a pivotal role in ensuring that community members have access to healthy food through local policies, including those in institutional settings. Under Kansas law, local governments have the authority to implement a variety of policies to increase access to healthy food and improve health within their communities. Local governments serve and sell food to large numbers of people through different means at institutional feeding sites. The American Heart Association has developed a series of resources and has technical assistance available to support efforts to embed nutrition standards in government policies impacting institutional feeding.

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