

# Nutrition and Physical Activity Update

The work of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Team focuses on reducing the prevalence of obesity and chronic diseases, especially in our most vulnerable children and whānau. We utilise the principles of the Ottawa Charter to improve access to healthy and affordable food and increase and promote physical activity in our community.

## The NPA Team

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## Healthier food choices for hospital staff and visitors

Imagine an environment where healthy food is the norm. Hutt Valley District Health Board, Capital & Coast District Health Board and Wairarapa District Health Board are making this a reality. By acting as role models to the community and demonstrating a commitment to the health and wellbeing of staff and visitors, the three District Health Boards (DHBs) have adopted guidelines that will see an **increase in the availability of healthy food and beverage options**. The 'healthy food and beverage environment guidelines' were approved in May 2015 and aim to make healthy food choice the easy choice. The development of these guidelines supports evidence that policy and environmental change are key to obesity prevention, in an environment that promotes eating too much and moving too little.

## Why are healthy food guidelines needed?

The past few decades have seen vast increases in the production, availability and marketing of nutrient poor, energy dense food and beverages. The abundance of these relatively cheap foods has contributed to people consuming far more calories/kilojoules than they need.

Peoples' food choices are influenced by many things, including economic, physical and political factors and effective prevention approaches need to impact these drivers to curb overconsumption of our modern food supply. Nutrition education is important as part of a comprehensive programme, but insufficient alone to impact behaviour change and the obesity epidemic. The increasing burden of obesity and lifestyle related diseases on the health system necessitates a change from an education to a prevention approach.

Policy is a proven public health tool that has impacted the use of bike helmets, seat belts in cars, and smoke-free environments. Such regulatory approaches have the potential to make healthy food more accessible in communities where we live, work and play. Gaining 'buy-in' however can be difficult as people are concerned about their personal freedom of choice. Many strategies will be needed to impact the obesity epidemic and the strong biological drivers of high energy food choices. Building and modelling a healthy food environment within our schools, workplaces and health sector, is one strategy gaining momentum to protect our children and the next generation from highly preventable nutrition related diseases.



## Gaining 'buy-in'

Capital & Coast DHB has had a food policy for visitors, employees and contractors since 2007. Staff support the policy as a means of modelling a healthy food culture. In May 2015, the Boards of each of the DHBs in the Wellington region (Capital & Coast DHB, Hutt Valley DHB and Wairarapa DHB) expressed their commitment to providing healthy food environments in our hospitals, by endorsing a guideline (based on the Auckland DHB's Policy) to address food quality and portion size for staff and visitors food. We will be aligning with Northland, Auckland, Toi te Ora, Hawkes Bay and Nelson DHBs to create positive change and a healthier food environment in our hospitals. Healthier food availability could drive demand and profitability as seen at this [Dunedin school canteen](http://www.heartfoundation.org.nz/news-blogs-stories/blogs/schools-dramatic-canteen-revamp) (or <http://www.heartfoundation.org.nz/news-blogs-stories/blogs/schools-dramatic-canteen-revamp>). Healthy food environment policies may also help to engage the food industry in healthier food reformulation, which may reinforce existing nutrition and obesity prevention efforts.

### The Healthy Food and Beverage Guidelines in a Nutshell

Five main criteria underpin the healthy food and beverage environment guidelines to support staff and visitors to make healthy food choices. Water, fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and foods with minimal fat, salt and sugar will be readily available and promoted. High energy and less nutrient dense foods such as soft drinks, confectionary and fried foods will be less readily available or offered in smaller portions sizes.

These guidelines will promote healthier food options in our vending machines, hospital shops and cafeterias at Wellington, Kenepuru, Hutt Valley and Wairarapa hospitals. The guidelines will also apply to fundraising, gifts offered to guest speakers on behalf of the DHBs, external catering, and sponsorship of programmes and services<sup>1</sup>.

Staff, patients and visiting whānau can continue to bring other food purchased off-site, or from home for lunches, snacks, shared meals and gifts.

## When, how?

Cafeteria menu changes will gradually be introduced into the DHB food services, for staff and visitors over the next 18 months. A group of staff and managers from all of the DHBs are supporting the implementation and evaluation of the guidelines. Hutt Valley, Wairarapa and Capital & Coast DHBs are committed to role modelling a healthy food environment and food policy, as a low cost tool to help make healthy food choices the easy choice, for people working in or visiting our hospitals. This guideline is expected to become policy at the end of the 18 months (end of 2016).

## Want to know more?

For full details of the policy or other queries please contact Vicki Robinson or email [RPH@huttvalleydhb.org.nz](mailto:RPH@huttvalleydhb.org.nz).

<sup>1</sup>This guideline excludes meals provided for patients.

