

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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Optimising food for all – working with the ‘charitable food sector’

Healthy food makes a difference

Food security¹ can have a profound impact on people’s social and physical well-being. Growing numbers of people experience poor food security in the Wellington region impacting their physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods to meet needs for a healthy life. The ‘charitable sector’ has grown to provide free and subsidised food to support people who experience food insecurity. Ways to ensure high quality food is provided in the ‘charitable food sector’ could help address the experiences of those with food insecurity and better cater for their nutrition, health, social and cultural needs.

Food and health links

Nutritious food is closely linked to good health. However, despite living in a food rich country, many people experience poor food security. The easy access to low cost processed food contributes to poor food choice, micronutrient deficiency and higher rates of chronic disease (infectious disease, mental illness, obesity and type 2 diabetes) which impacts negatively on both quality of life and life expectancy^{2,3,4}. Local studies find people who are food insecure are often knowledgeable about budgeting and healthy eating and would like to eat well but competing demands for their limited income makes it difficult⁵. Making low cost high quality food readily accessible for all people using these important services could support better health outcomes.

¹ The assured ability to acquire nutritionally and safe food that meets cultural needs and has been acquired in a socially acceptable way.

² Bowers, S. et al., Enhancing food security and physical activity for Maori, Pacific and low-income. 2009, Clinical trials research Unit, University of Auckland; Geo Health laboratory, University of Canterbury; Health Promotion and Policy Unit, University of Otago; Te Hotu Mananwa Māori. Wellington.

³ Ministry of Health. 2013. New Zealand Health Survey: Annual update of key findings 2012/13. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

⁴ NZ Institute of Economic Research, A discussion of the non-health impacts of obesity in NZ. Jan 2015. Social Policy Evaluation and research Unit.

⁵ McPherson, K., Food Insecurity and the Food bank Industry: a geographical analysis of food bank use and in Christchurch. 2006,. accessed 9 March, 2015, http://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/10092/1351/1/thesis_fulltext.pdf, Thesis, University of Canterbury.



Accessing low cost 'healthy' food

The steady growth in community, voluntary and charitable organisations to meet the demands of people with food insecurity broadly fit:

1. Food rescue (food is collected from restaurants, supermarkets and markets e.g. **Kaibosh** and **Kiwi Community Assistance** and distributed to a range of organisations);
2. Food banks (store and distribute food parcels); and
3. Community/welfare programmes (provide free and low cost meals and 'giveaways') e.g. **Suzanne Aubert Compassion Centre Soup Kitchen**.



The Suzanne Aubert Compassion Center Soup Kitchen.

The role of charitable food services has primarily been to provide a safety net for people struggling to feed themselves, in emergencies or for temporary relief and not necessarily to meet their nutritional requirements. Menu planning and food provision is constrained by the reliance on community, private and corporate donations. However with increasing links between food quality and health, the Regional Public Health, Nutrition and Physical Activity team has been working with some charitable food services to look for opportunities to enable higher quality food provision.

Opportunities to improve the nutritional quality of food

Menu review and guest survey

The Suzanne Aubert Compassion Centre Soup Kitchen provides around 100 low income men and woman with an affordable daily hot breakfast and evening meal six days a week. To ensure optimal nutrition provision, Regional Public Health partnered with University of Otago, Dietetic training programme in 2014 to support the Soup Kitchen to undertake a menu review. An audit tool was developed to assess how well the menu aligned with Ministry of Health nutritional guidelines for adults and to identify nutritional gaps and opportunities to optimise food for guests. This year a guest's survey was also used to identify guest profile, perception of meals and their barriers and enablers to healthy food intake. Ideas obtained are being further explored to enhance Soup Kitchen meal provision.

Optimising food provided by the community and voluntary sector

Local and international evidence suggests there is room for improvement in the nutritional quality of food parcels and meals provided in this sector. Regional Public Health is currently scoping opportunities to contribute to the nutrition, health, cultural and social outcomes of people who are food insecure. The Regional Public Health Service scoping report to be finalised in the coming months is likely to recommend:

- Gaining a better understanding of the current local services, practises, and systems (a stocktake).
- Obtaining stakeholder views on the barriers and promoters of healthy food provision and to identify the strengths, gaps and overlaps of current charitable food services.
- A comprehensive look at alternate local and international systems used to support food insecurity.
- Identifying opportunities to develop food service standards in this sector.

Want to know more?

If you would like to contribute to this paper or find out more about our work please contact Vicki Robinson at Vicki.Robinson@huttvalleydhb.org.nz