

Working Together to Support Healthy Eating in Recreational Facilities

Research Summary

This is a summary of the 2012 research article “Adopting and implementing nutrition guidelines in recreational facilities: public and private sector roles” by Dana Lee Olstad, Kim Raine, and Linda McCargar

STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

- Recreational facility managers act as “gatekeepers.” They influence the use of the **Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth (ANGCY)** within their facility. In this study, the ANGCY were more likely to be used in facilities that had a supportive manager who prioritized offering healthy food.
- Recreational facility managers could not apply the ANGCY alone. Linkages with schools and health-promoting partnerships with food vendors were key to supporting change.
- To significantly improve healthy food options in recreational facilities, stronger government action and support may be required.

BACKGROUND

- Roughly 80% of public recreational facilities in Alberta sell food in vending machines and concessions. Despite a mandate to promote health, many facilities sell unhealthy food.
- In 2008, the Government of Alberta released the ANGCY. The ANGCY are voluntary nutrition guidelines designed to help recreational facilities, schools and childcare settings improve children’s access to healthy food. However, one year after the guidelines were issued, very few recreational facilities were using them.

STUDY PURPOSE

- To understand factors influencing use of the ANGCY in Alberta public recreational facilities.

STUDY METHODS

- Three public recreational facilities in Alberta were chosen to take part in the study.
- Facilities were chosen based on whether they used the ANGCY in all, some, or none of their vending machines and concessions.
- Researchers scored the availability of healthy food options in each facility and identified factors influencing the use of the ANGCY.



KEY FINDINGS

- The manager as “gatekeeper”: Facilities were more likely to use the ANGCY when managers saw a need to increase availability of healthy food options in their facilities and supported the use of the ANGCY.
- Managers could not successfully use the ANGCY alone. Another key to success was making connections with schools and food vendors that had experience with the guidelines.
- Availability of healthy food options was not substantially higher in facilities that were using the ANGCY compared to facilities that were not.

Availability of Healthy Food Options in Vending Machines

Healthy food and beverage options	Facilities using ANGCY	Facility not using ANGCY
Choose Most Foods	Very Limited (2-4%)	None (0%)
Choose Most Beverages	Limited (26-31%)	Very Limited (13%)



Managers' use of the ANGCY was influenced by:

Value placed on healthy eating

- Managers who personally valued healthy eating and felt responsible for the wellness of their patrons were more likely to use the ANGCY.

Level of nutrition knowledge

- Some managers believed the food in their facility was healthy because it was made with fresh, ‘real’ ingredients (e.g. hot chocolate with fresh milk, hamburgers with 100% beef). They did not consider factors such as nutrient content. As a result, they did not feel a need to make changes to the food offered in their facility.

Fear of losing revenue

- Managers believed that selling unhealthy food would bring in more revenue. This revenue helped provide funds that facilities relied upon to provide affordable recreation programs and services. For some managers, the need to generate revenue competed with the goal of providing healthier food.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Recreational facility managers played an important role in encouraging the use of the ANGCY within their facilities. Managers who saw a need to improve availability of healthy food options in their facility were more likely to use the ANGCY.
- Managers could not create change alone. Developing health promoting partnerships and informal linkages with schools and food vendors was key to success.
- Even when facilities used the ANGCY, availability of healthy food increased only slightly. To significantly improve the availability of healthy food in Alberta facilities, mandatory nutrition policy and more government support may be required.

REFERENCE

Olstad, D. L., Raine, K. D., & McCargar, L. J. (2012). Adopting and implementing nutrition guidelines in recreational facilities: public and private sector roles. *BMC public health*, 12(1), 1-20.

This research summary was produced by the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention as a part of the Food Action in Recreation Environments project and generously supported by a grant from the Edmonton Community Foundation. For more information on policy to promote healthy food environments in recreational facilities, visit www.apccpreproject.com or email APCCP info@abpolicycoalitionforprevention.ca.