

Knowledge and Use of Voluntary Nutrition Guidelines in Alberta Recreational Facilities

Research Summary

This is a summary of the 2011 research article “Improving children’s nutrition environments: a survey of adoption and implementation of nutrition guidelines in recreational facilities” by Dana Lee Olstad, Shauna Downs, Kim Raine, Tanya Berry, and Linda McCargar

STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

- The **Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth (ANGCY)** were released in 2008. One year after their release, half of recreational facility managers had not heard of them and only a few (6%) had taken steps to apply them in their facilities.
- Facilities were more likely to use the ANGCY if someone in the facility was actively promoting them. A barrier to facility use of the guidelines was the belief that selling healthy food hurts profits.
- Policy mandated by the provincial government may be needed to improve children’s access to healthy food options in recreational facilities.

BACKGROUND

- Public recreational facilities promote wellbeing by providing affordable places for children to be physically active. Yet, many facilities sell unhealthy foods, which can make healthy choices difficult for young people.
- The ANGCY are voluntary nutrition guidelines designed to help recreational facilities, schools and child care centres increase children’s access to healthy food.
- This study explored public recreational facility managers’ knowledge and use of the ANGCY one year after their release.



STUDY PURPOSE

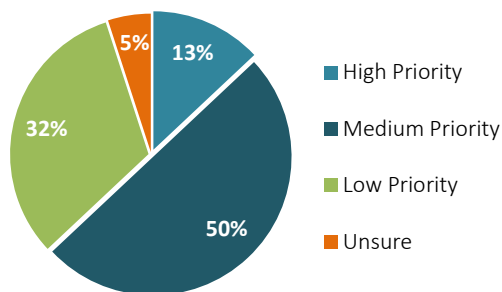
- Researchers investigated two key questions:
 1. Do Alberta recreational facilities know about and use the ANGCY?
 2. What factors influence the use of the ANGCY?



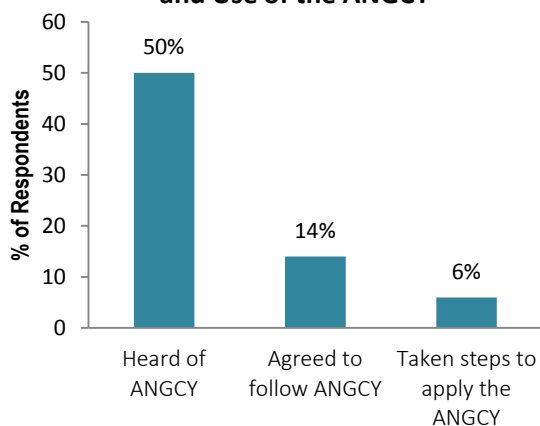
STUDY METHODS

- 408 public recreational facilities in Alberta were invited to do a telephone survey about the ANGCY. 151 recreational facility managers completed the survey.
- As part of the survey, respondents were asked:
 - if they knew about the ANGCY
 - whether they followed the guidelines
 - if their facility had taken steps to apply them

How Do Recreational Facilities Prioritize Healthy Eating?



Alberta Recreational Facilities' Knowledge and Use of the ANGCY



A survey of 151 people working at the managerial level or higher (e.g. city councilor, mayor) measured their knowledge and use of the ANGCY, as well as the priority placed on healthy eating within their recreational facility.

Use of the ANGCY

It was **easier** to follow the ANGCY when the facility:

Had a champion

- A key person or champion within the facility promoted their use.

Had food and nutrition policies

- Nutrition policies were already in place to encourage healthy food choices, and nutrition was given a higher priority within the facility.

It was **harder** to follow the ANGCY when the facility:

Perceived that the current menu was ok

- Some respondents believed customers and staff were happy with current food options, such as burgers and fries. They felt that their facility should provide food options that their customers want instead of offering healthier choices outlined in the ANGCY.

Perceived that profits would decrease

- Some respondents believed that using the ANGCY would hurt revenue and decrease profits from food and beverage sales. Some managers said healthier foods were more expensive to serve, while others said unhealthy foods sell better.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The ANGCY can help recreational facilities encourage healthy food choices.** However, one year after their release, few recreational facilities in Alberta knew about the ANGCY and even fewer were using them.
- **Government mandated nutrition policy may be a better approach to ensure children have access to healthy food in these settings.**

REFERENCE

Olstad, D. L., Downs, S. M., Raine, K. D., Berry, T. R., & McCargar, L. J. (2011). Improving children's nutrition environments: a survey of adoption and implementation of nutrition guidelines in recreational facilities. *BMC Public Health*, 11(1), 1-12.

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