



The Region of Peel's Nutrition Policy and Menu Labelling Initiative



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The Region of Peel (ROP) is the second largest municipality in Ontario, serving a population of 1.4 million residents in the Cities of Brampton and Mississauga, and the Town of Caledon (Region of Peel, 2015). In October 2014, the ROP introduced workplace nutrition standards to increase the availability of healthy food options in its two Regional cafeterias, as well as incorporated menu labelling of calories and sodium. In doing so, the ROP's goal was to make healthier choices easier for staff and visitors by creating healthier food environments. Peel is currently implementing these changes within the ROP's two main cafeterias. However, moving forward, there are plans to explore opportunities that will support the creation of healthy food environments in workplaces across the region. This story examines how policy-level change to create healthier food environments in the two cafeterias came about and shares lessons learned throughout the process.

Creating Healthy Environments: Getting Strategic

The Nutrition Policy and Menu Labelling Initiative at the ROP was part of a wider set of initiatives taking place within the region to make healthy choices easier for employees and residents. In the latter half of the 2000s, the ROP began to get strategic about reducing rising rates of chronic disease, such as diabetes and obesity. This involved a number of actions and initiatives, which signaled a move away from a focus on individual responsibility towards an emphasis on creating supportive environments for health. Within Peel Public Health (PPH), key champions of this strategic direction included the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Director of Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention. Examples of key actions and initiatives include:

- ◆ In 2008, PPH released the report, *A Picture of Health: A Comprehensive Report on Health in Peel*, which examined health issues in the region and how a range of determinants, such as income, education, and workplace stress, influence the well-being of residents.

**[The Region
of Peel]
wanted to
become a
model
employer by
increasing
access to
fresh,
flavourful,
and healthy
food.**

Mary Kingshott-Zelem
Dietitian and Lead,
Region of Peel



- In 2011, the ROP Council highlighted their political support for healthy environments when they outlined “the promotion of a supportive environment for healthy weights” as a key priority for Council (Mowat, 2012).
- From 2010-2011, PPH undertook several initiatives to support Peel school boards in implementing the Ontario Ministry of Education’s *School Food and Beverage Policy*.
- In 2012, Council approved PPH’s *Supportive Environments for Healthy Living Strategy*, one aspect of which involved promoting healthy eating in workplace settings.
- In 2012, PPH began consulting with experts from New York City on built environment initiatives, including efforts to promote healthy food served and sold in public buildings. This consultation process culminated in a symposium called *Healthy Peel by Design*, held on October 19, 2012.



Mississauga, ON, Wikimedia Commons

Putting A Resolution Forward to Council

Building on its ongoing initiatives and a growing political commitment to support healthier environments, in June 2012, PPH put forward a resolution to Council aimed at increasing access to healthy food and implementing menu labelling in the two Regional cafeterias. Council passed the resolution, directing PPH to implement menu labelling in the two cafeterias and vending machines, as well as nutrition standards for food served and sold in Peel Regional and Municipal buildings (Council of the Regional Municipality of Peel, 2012). Reflecting on the process, a key factor in the resolution’s success was PPH’s ability to harness the support of high-level champions in the ROP, such as the Chief Administrative Officer, Commissioner of Health, Commissioner of Human Services ,and two Regional Councillors. These high-level champions were aware of the health status of Peel’s population and committed to taking action on diabetes and obesity in the region.



Brampton, ON, Wikimedia Commons



Policy Development: Moving to a “Request for Proposal”

After Council passed the resolution on menu labelling and nutrition standards, the ROP created an inter-departmental working group to move forward with the nutrition policy and menu labelling initiative. Led by a public health nutritionist, the working group included representatives from Public Health, Human Services, Real Property Asset Management, Purchasing, Legal, and Communications departments.

The next step involved creating a “Request for Proposal” (RFP) process for contracting out food services. The timing was right for a change as the current food service vendor’s contract was coming up for renewal. The RFP would enable the ROP to incorporate menu labelling and nutrition criteria into the food service contract, thus creating a shared accountability with vendors to meet the criteria.



Council Chamber, Wikimedia Commons

With the timing right for change, PPH identified opportunities to educate and work with partners to create a shared interdepartmental vision for offering fresh, flavourful, and healthy food in the two Regional cafeterias. Considering the value that all partners bring to developing and managing food service contracts, spending this time upfront to generate a shared vision and buy-in was key. Factors that helped to achieve buy-in at this stage included sharing lessons from other workplace settings and support from high-level champions, such as the Chief Administrator Officer, Commissioners, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, and the Director of Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention. Additional factors included engaging in advocacy and raising awareness of provincial menu labelling recommendations.

Once a shared vision was adopted, the writing of the RFP began. As part of this process, a food service consultant was hired to assist in articulating the criteria for the nutrition standards, menu labelling, and service requirements.

Strong buy-in was needed from senior level champions ... the entire RFP wouldn't have been possible without their leadership and support.

Mary Kingshott-Zelem, Region of Peel

Making Changes Over Time

The new vendor started in the ROP's two Regional cafeterias on October 1st, 2014, almost two years after Council passed the resolution. One of the biggest changes to the cafeterias involved installing new cooking equipment, as well as incorporating changes to the physical environment of the cafeterias over time. Currently, the vendor labels the amount of calories and sodium at the point of purchase and provides employees with access to menus and nutrition information through the Regional intranet.

Since the new vendor arrived, significant improvements have been made to the food and beverages served and sold in the cafeterias. For example, items such as soups, entrées, and deli sandwiches are prepared in-house using fresh, flavourful, and minimally processed ingredients. Further, healthier choices in the cafeteria and vending machines have replaced the “not permitted” items, such as deep fried foods, confectionary, and sugar-sweetened beverages. A salad bar has also been added to each cafeteria. Ultimately, the success of the initiative thus far can be attributed to a respectful and collaborative partnership between the Region and the vendor. In turn, the partnership supports and enables the vendor to implement the initiative successfully.

Facilitators of Success

Reflecting on the transition to the new vendor, employee engagement has been critical. One strategy for engagement has been to involve employees in the change process; for example, inviting them to consultations and activities such as taste-testing sessions. It has also been important to frame changes in a positive light, including highlighting the benefits of offering healthier choices.

Turnover of food service staff in the cafeterias has presented challenges, such as ensuring staff are adequately trained on the nutrition standards and the fresh, flavourful, and healthy approach. This challenge has been mitigated by having a Registered Dietitian and a Workplace Health Team readily available to assist the vendor with implementation and to address questions and challenges. Joint meetings between the project team and the vendor have also been beneficial in addressing challenges as they emerge, highlighting the importance of collaboration.



Cafeteria, Pexels

Evaluation and Next Steps

In terms of evaluating the changes made thus far, PPH has completed a pre- and post-survey and series of focus groups with employees. Preliminary findings from the evaluation suggest that many employees perceive the availability of healthy options to be positive. Findings also indicate that while people are aware of the posted nutrition information, more education is required to help people understand the meaning behind such information.

When it comes to creating healthy food environments in the two cafeterias, there is continued work to be done. However, as Kingshott-Zelem notes, the changes are slowly becoming “more of a norm in the day-to-day work life of staff in the two buildings.” Moving forward, the ROP hopes to expand the nutrition standards to other workplaces in the region, applying lessons learned from the process thus far.

Key Lessons



- ♦ **Work with high level champions** to establish healthy environments as a strategic priority among decision-makers.
- ♦ **Internal support and resources are key.** Strong support from management and the health department, as well as internal resources (i.e. staff, time, funding), are required to do this work successfully.
- ♦ **Devote time** upfront to partnership development and shared visioning.
- ♦ **Work from an evidence-informed decision-making framework** and have a program planning and evaluation process in place from beginning to end.
- ♦ **Identify and involve a range of stakeholders** in the change management process.
- ♦ **Create an RFP process** that includes clear criteria and accountability.
- ♦ **Be willing to invest time and resources** when making changes to the food environment.

For More Information:

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