Healthy Organizations Leading the Way for King County

Organizations across King County are taking action by making healthy food and beverage choices easier for their staff and the people they serve.

In King County, over half of adults and one in five middle school and high school youth are overweight or obese, increasing their risk of dental carries, diabetes, heart disease and depression.

A key strategy to combat obesity is to increase access to healthy food and drinks where we live, work, learn and play. Organizations that represent these spaces benefit from making healthy choices a priority. They are improving the wellbeing and productivity of their staff, and showing that the health of their patrons and residents is core to their mission.

We encourage you to read the following success stories to be inspired and to learn about unique approaches to implementing change. These changes range from making water dispensers accessible and providing healthy snacks at meetings to adopting a new healthy vending policy and limiting the sale of sugary drinks.

King County Organizations Featured

| Alliant Employee Benefits Northwest | Seattle Children’s Hospital* |
| American Heart Association          | Seattle Housing Authority*  |
| City of Seattle*                    | Seattle Parks & Recreation Skills, Inc. |
| School’s Out Washington             | YMCA or Greater Seattle*    |
| Seattle Aquarium                   |                             |

* Implemented a healthy vending policy based on King County Healthy Vending Guidelines

KING COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH
HEALTHY VENDING GUIDELINES

The King County Board of Health passed the King County Healthy Vending Guidelines in April 2011. These guidelines distinguish between highly processed items that are high in fat, salt, and sugar and healthy nutrient rich options that contain fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Both these guidelines and its corresponding Healthy Vending Implementation Toolkit are being used as healthy vending models state-wide and nationally. Spokane and the Washington State Department of Health are looking to adopt similar guidelines.
Healthy Food & Beverage
SUCCESS STORIES

ALLIANT EMPLOYEE BENEFITS NORTHWEST

Alliant Employee Benefits is a benefits consulting firm with national scope. In its Seattle Branch, Alliant is committed to creating a workplace that makes it easier to choose health. Soda vending machines used to line the kitchen walls, offering a can of soda for $0.25. Although employees stated that they were trying to “quit”, consumption rates were high, estimated at two cans of soda per person per day. It was too easy to choose soda over other, healthier options.

To make alternatives the easier choice, the price of soda was increased substantially and more cold water dispensers were placed in the office. Ultimately, the soda machines were replaced with self-service access to flavored sparkling water. As a result, employees have expressed gratitude for the change because it has helped them achieve personal goals of cutting back on soda consumption. With the newfound space, the kitchen now has two refrigerators, two microwaves and two nice bistro tables making it a great place for employees to enjoy homemade lunches together.

To further support nutritional health, employees have access to articles and publications on nutrition and diet, as well as visual flyers that show how sugary drinks affect the body. When lunch is brought in for meetings or events, a salad is always available and dessert is no longer ordered. Once a month, fresh fruit is delivered to the office. To further promote healthy eating, Alliant is expanding efforts to include healthy cooking classes and the introduction of fruit smoothie carts for afternoon pick-me-ups.

The executives at Alliant Employee Benefits Northwest truly believe that in order to create a great workplace, it’s important to care about employees’ health and to help make the healthy choice the easy choice.
The American Heart Association is a national organization focusing on advocacy, education, and research on cardiovascular disease, and the Seattle branch is committed to fostering a healthy food and beverage environment.

The office has a water dispenser so water is easily accessible by staff and visitors. Due to little use, the office no longer has a soda vending machine. Although the Seattle branch has guidelines from the national office to provide healthy food and drink options, the staff decide what items to order for meetings and events. At meetings, water is the primary beverage, but other non-sugar sweetened options are available as well.

Additionally, all branches cannot accept sponsorships from companies whose missions are not aligned with theirs (e.g., tobacco companies, McDonald’s, Coca-Cola). If a third party holds an event to benefit the American Heart Association, it also must adhere to the national guidelines. For holidays and other informal celebrations, staff will try to hold contests for who can bring in the healthiest item. Since the American Heart Association works with worksites on their wellness policies, it strives to “walk the talk” within their own organization.

Examples of healthy food options at an American Heart Association meeting

CITY OF SEATTLE

In March of 2013, Seattle City Council passed an ordinance requiring all vending machines operated on city property to have a minimum of 50% healthy vending based on the King County Healthy Vending Guidelines. This will impact the nearly 10,000 City of Seattle employees and the many visitors.
Healthy Food & Beverage SUCCESS STORIES

SCHOOL’S OUT WASHINGTON

Through training, advocacy, and leadership, School’s Out Washington works with youth programs and community partners to ensure that children have safe places to play and learn outside of the school day.

Over the last few years, through increased knowledge and awareness, School’s Out Washington has been active in changing its workplace culture around food and beverages. Staff now provide healthy snacks at meetings and make sure to offer vegetarian and gluten-free options. Additionally, water is easily accessible through two water dispensers in the office and is always offered to visitors. School’s Out Washington also participated in Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition’s Soda-free Sundays Campaign.

This shift to healthier food and beverages has sparked valuable internal discussions around how children are impacted by the foods and beverages that child care and youth program staff consume on site.

SEATTLE HOUSING AUTHORITY

Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) provides long-term rental housing and rental assistance to more than 26,000 people with low incomes, with a mission to create and sustain decent, safe and affordable living environments that foster stability and increase self-sufficiency.

After some residents and community stakeholders expressed an interest in having healthy choices in their vending machine, SHA decided to pilot healthy vending at six residential sites and involve residents through healthy vending presentations, surveys, and taste tests. SHA worked with their vendor to pilot 30% healthy vending based on the King County Healthy Vending Guidelines.

While there was no change in total sales, there was a 10% increase in the sales of healthy snacks in the residential buildings and 24% increase in healthy snack sales in the administrative buildings. As a result of this success and to align with the City of Seattle healthy vending ordinance, SHA issued a healthy vending RFP requiring its next contracted vendor to adhere to a minimum of 50% healthy vending in all of its residential and administrative buildings.
Healthy Food & Beverage
SUCCESS STORIES

SEATTLE AQUARIUM

Seattle Aquarium, a family-friendly place to explore and learn about marine life, strives to offer healthy food and beverage options to visitors of all ages that are sustainable and locally sourced when possible.

The café on the second floor has many healthy options for visitors and staff, such as all-natural chicken from the grill, veggie dogs, and gluten-free items. Water is available and can be accessed from the soda fountain through two spigots. Staff test products and carefully consider which items they will sell in the café. They declined to sell a certain children’s beverage because the sugar content was too high. The kids’ meal includes seasonal fruit, animal crackers, a sandwich on wheat bread, and milk or juice. Staff also try to create fun, healthy meals that children will want to eat. For example, staff made a savory pie with meat and vegetables, making it look like a cupcake so that it appeals to children.

Parents have provided positive feedback on the kids’ meals, often saying that the Aquarium offers the healthiest meals compared to other family-friendly attractions in the area. Parents have provided positive feedback on the kids’ meals, often saying that the aquarium offers the healthiest meal compared to other family-friendly attractions in the area. Staff continue to work on improving the items offered in the kids’ meal and the selection of healthy options in the café.

Healthy and convenient snack options available for Aquarium visitors
Healthy drinks are prominently displayed on the top shelves near eye-level
In September 2012 Seattle Children's Hospital (Children's) launched its Mission: Nutrition initiative, aimed at improving food and beverage options. This was driven by a desire to "walk the talk" and truly model health and wellness to Children's patients, families and staff. A multidisciplinary team including Children's staff, physicians and patient family members worked together to develop the program. Market research was also conducted to determine how families feel about hospital food choices. Of families surveyed, 64% said they would be more likely to visit the cafeterias if they offered healthier food and beverage options.

To help inform specific food and beverage changes, the team used the King County Healthy Vending Guidelines. Now, all sugar-sweetened drinks sold in Children's cafeterias, the gift shop and vending machines must have less than 10 calories per eight-ounce serving. There are still plenty of choices, including 100% unsweetened juice; diet soda; unflavored milk; flavored skim and 1% milk; unsweetened coffee and tea; flavored and carbonated water; and soy milk. Children's also started offering hummus and vegetables; baked chips and snacks (rather than fried); a seasonal organic fruit; Greek yogurt; and fruit and nut trail mixes.

An email is available for patients, families and staff to submit feedback and ideas about food and drink choices. Children's will use those ideas to inform and develop future changes.
SEATTLE PARKS AND RECREATION

Seattle Parks and Recreation oversees the city’s parks, beaches, pools, and recreation facilities, offering all citizens programs and opportunities to be active.

The department made a decision that it would "walk the talk" and create a healthier food and beverage environment since its mission is health and wellness for the community. Beginning in 2009, the department implemented a 100% healthy vending policy based on their own guidelines. Revenue from vending has increased since the changes.

Additionally, only food trucks with healthy options are allowed in Seattle parks. They have declined sponsorship from a fast food company because their missions were not aligned, and encouraged them to offer healthier items that would follow healthier standards. While no written policy exists for what can be served at meetings and events, they prefer vendors that serve whole wheat, tofu, and other healthier alternatives.

Staff behaviors around food and beverage choices are shifting, largely due to nutrition and obesity education. For example, staff watched a demonstration that showed how much sugar was in a can of soda and began thinking about what they were putting in their bodies and it made many think twice.

Healthy Food & Beverage SUCCESS STORIES

Healthy snack options available at the International District/Chinatown Community Center

Revenue has increased since implementing a 100% healthy vending policy
YMCA OF GREATER SEATTLE

YMCA of Greater Seattle, an organization that supports and strengthens children, families, and communities, adopted healthy food and beverage policies and practices. Through the Activate America Initiative, the National YMCA made a commitment to enhance services to improve health. In order to be role models for communities across the country, the Y created an environmental assessment that requires YMCAs to meet food and beverage standards. The assessment was first rolled out in urban YMCAs, and as a result, the YMCA of Greater Seattle has been implementing it for several years now. The assessment calls for local YMCAs to serve healthy items such as fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nonfat or low-fat milk, 100% juice, and no soda or sugar-sweetened beverages. Additionally, fundraising with food is prohibited.

In addition to the assessment, the YMCA of Greater Seattle has an employee health task force that works to change staff behaviors to choose healthier foods and beverages. For example, when sweets are brought in for celebrations, they are placed next to healthier foods, like a bowl of carrots, so staff members have better options.

The YMCA of Greater Seattle also adheres to the King County Healthy Vending Guidelines, filling vending machines with healthier foods like apples and low-fat string cheese. Parents have expressed appreciation for these alternatives in the vending machines. The YMCA offers two resident camps for children, which observe the same healthy food and beverage guidelines. The Y is committed to being role models for healthy living at all of their sites and programs.
SKILLS, INC.

Skills, Inc., a Seattle-based company that is dedicated to employing people with disabilities, is a model workplace with a healthy food and beverage environment.

In 2011, they shifted to “Balanced Choices” vending machines to keep in line with the wellness messages they were promoting among their employees. These machines place regular soda at the bottom and prominently display water, juice, and tea at eye-level. Water is competitively priced at just $0.50 to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

Skills, Inc.’s Wellness Committee also implemented a healthy breakfast and lunch program in the absence of a cafeteria. Breakfast is offered five days a week for $1 and includes cereal, milk and a piece of fruit. Lunch is offered three days a week for $4 and includes an entrée (salad, sandwich or wrap), baked chips, fruit and water. They also have nutritional lunch and learns, a company walking program, and Weight Watchers at work, among other wellness activities.

WHAT CAN I DO?

✔ Take the Hydrate for Health pledge at www.hydrafeforhealth.org. Talk to your employer about promoting access to healthy beverages in the workplace. Take action by making healthy drink choices easy for your staff, patrons and community. Contact: info@hydrateforhealth.org or (206) 910-7643.

✔ Implement healthy vending at your organization today. Put healthy food and beverages within reach of you, your colleagues and your visitors. For technical assistance contact: Joyce Tseng, Project Coordinator at joyce@copcwa.org or (206) 579-5330.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

✔ Explore www.hydrafeforhealth.org for resources and more information.
✔ Seattle King County Public Health has a website with information on what you need to know about health and sugary drinks: www.kingcounty.gov/health/sugarydrinks
✔ Learn more about the King County Healthy Vending Guidelines at http://tinyurl.com/HealthyVendingGuidelines