

## Stay Active Eat Healthy Program Overview

### Why are healthy choices important in recreation facilities?

Recreation facilities are a key community setting with the power to change people's behaviour.

The environments in which Canadian families live, learn, work and play offer repeated and sustained exposure to unhealthy food choices (energy dense foods with low nutrient value), which contributes to the trends in obesity that are now being observed. There's no shortage of evidence showing the benefits of a diet rich in vegetables, fruits and whole grains. People who eat healthily are less likely to be overweight, suffer from chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, and have fewer dental problems. What's more, healthy eating, when combined with physical activity, improves quality of life in all dimensions – physical, emotional, mental and social.

Public recreation centres have been identified as a critical setting in which to improve healthier food options, restrict access to unhealthy food, and reinforce healthy eating messages. They are a primary community setting for physical activity, recreation, wellness, mental health and community meetings and they offer a variety of food services, including vending machines, cafes and concessions, and provide food at programs and public events. Ironically, research shows that recreation centers in Canada have not been providing a healthy food environment for the families they serve<sup>1</sup>.

Recreation facilities are already in the business of promoting health and wellness, so it makes sense to provide healthy food and beverage choices and influence healthy eating behaviour in the community; aligning values with reality. In addition, many customers are asking for a more supportive food environment.

### What is the Stay Active Eat Healthy - Healthy Food and Beverage Sales Initiative?

Stay Active Eat Healthy is an evidence-based capacity building initiative from BC that aims to increase the provision of healthy food and beverages while restricting unhealthy options in municipal and community recreation facilities.

The initiative is designed to facilitate this change in vending machines and other food services such as concessions and catering, programming (e.g. food provided in childcare, kindergym, sports programs), events (e.g. Canada Day celebrations), 3rd party fundraising (e.g. swim team selling food to raise money) and food security (providing breakfast, community gardens, fruit trees, local pocket market).

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<sup>1</sup> Naylor, P., Bridgewater, L., Purcell, M., Ostry, A., & Vander Wekken, S. (2010). Publically Funded Recreation Facilities: Obesogenic Environments for Children and Families? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 7(5), 2208- 2221.

Chaumette, P., Morency, S., Royer, A., Lemieux, S., & Tremblay, A. (2009). [Food environment in the sports, recreational and cultural facilities of Quebec City: a look at the situation]. *Canadian Journal Of Public Health. Revue Canadienne De Santé Publique*, 100(4), 310-314.

Naylor, P., Vander Wekken, S., Trill, D., & Kirbyson, A. (2010). Facilitating Healthier Food Environments in Public Recreation Facilities: Results of a Pilot Project in British Columbia, Canada. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 28(4), 37-58.

### **What support will facilities receive?**

Facilities engaged in the Stay Active Eat Healthy - Healthy Food and Beverage Sales initiative will receive training and support from a Regional Coordinator, who in turn will receive support from a BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) Coordinator and Dietitian consultants through HealthLink BC. Facilities will also have access to an online toolkit and a wide array of resources (e.g. healthy recipes, sample contracts, ideas for action, etc.) developed by the BCRPA to help them with their transition to becoming a Healthy Choices Facility.

### **How does this initiative benefit the community?**

There's a significant opportunity for us to make a difference in the health of a community, not only through the social and physical activities already provided by recreation facilities, but also by becoming a Healthy Choices Facility. Becoming a Healthy Choices Facilities is one step in working towards healthy individuals living in a healthy community.

There are also significant capacity building benefits for communities that engage in the Stay Active Eat Healthy - Healthy Food and Beverage Sales initiative. These include:

- a) Mobilizing key decision makers and building/facility managers to implement healthy food and beverage sales in community centre settings such as recreation facilities.
- b) Promoting awareness and support among community and industry stakeholders for healthy food and beverage choices.
- c) Building capacity to enable communities to implement healthy food and beverage choices.
- d) Facilitating integration of healthy choices with other healthy eating initiatives, and the activities of community partners.
- e) Adopting and implementing policies and programs for healthy food and beverage sales in recreation facilities.

All families benefit from healthy food and beverage choices in their community and community facilities.

### **How is this project being funded?**

The extension of the Stay Active Eat Healthy - Healthy Food and Beverage Sales initiative has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada, through the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. This project is part of a larger initiative being run by the Collaborative Action on Childhood Obesity (CACO) coalition.

*Note: The views expressed herein represent the views of the Collaborative Action on Childhood Obesity (CACO) coalition and do not necessarily represent the views of the project funders.*