

# Supporting Healthy Eating in Recreational Facilities

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Despite their health mandate, studies show that many recreational facilities offer large numbers of unhealthy foods. This is an important problem because unhealthy diets increase the risk for childhood obesity. Alberta has released voluntary nutrition guidelines to assist recreational facilities to offer healthier options to children, however few facilities are using these guidelines. The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that influence whether or not recreational facilities use nutrition guidelines.



## Study Highlights:

- Adoption of nutrition guidelines depended on the beliefs, perceptions and knowledge of the facility manager.
- Profitability was the greatest concern for managers considering adopting nutrition guidelines.
- Partnerships with industry and schools were essential to implement nutrition guidelines.

## Influence of the Facility Manager

Adoption of nutrition guidelines was more likely when the recreational facility manager:

- ▶ Personally valued healthy eating and viewed nutrition guidelines positively.
- ▶ Was a champion for change.
- ▶ Put a high priority on supporting community wellness through promoting healthy eating.

## Financial Concerns

- ▶ Managers believed that selling unhealthy food was more profitable than selling healthy food.
- ▶ Adopting facilities were willing to take small financial risks by making healthier items more available, but were not willing to stop selling unhealthy items.
- ▶ Increasing availability of healthier items, while continuing to sell unhealthy items helped some facilities manage perceived financial risks.

## Partnerships with Industry and Schools

- ▶ Cooperation with food contractors was essential to implement nutrition guidelines because recreational facilities had no food service experience.
- ▶ Managers who had good relationships with food contractors were able to work within existing contracts to offer healthier items in their facilities.
- ▶ Recreational facility managers who used the nutrition guidelines learned about the guidelines from others who were using them in schools.
- ▶ Food contractors developed capacity to implement nutrition guidelines through using nutrition guidelines in schools.
- ▶ Only food contractors who were using the nutrition guidelines in schools were willing to use the guidelines in recreational facilities.
- ▶ School boards supported use of nutrition guidelines in recreational facilities because some students were leaving schools to purchase unhealthy foods at nearby recreational facilities.