



ANCHOR

ACCELERATING NATIONAL COMMUNITY HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH REINFORCING PARTNERSHIPS

SHARING SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR HEALTHY VENDING



Three municipalities in northern Virginia, including the Department of Parks and Recreation in Arlington County, the Fairfax County Park Authority in Fairfax, and the City of Alexandria, have combined efforts to encourage their communities to make healthier food and beverage choices outside the home. The three jurisdictions separately adopted the same healthy vending policy after sharing the nutritional guidelines and model policy with each other. The policy requires the supply, installation, stocking, and maintenance of 100% healthy vending machine services.

This unusual cooperation between municipalities allowed local leaders to swap best practices and help each other find the right vendor that would support their efforts to provide healthier snack and drink options to their employees and residents when they visit city owned buildings or public recreational places. The American Heart Association (AHA) has worked with these Northern Virginia entities to help educate the public and municipal employees about the new vending policies and how communities are benefiting from them at work and at play.

The Challenge

In 2014, the Center for Science in the Public Interest evaluated the food and beverage options available in 853 vending machines located in 37 states across the country, including Virginia; all the machines in the study were located on state and local property like agency buildings or parks and recreation facilities. More than 50% of the vending machines surveyed were primarily stocked with unhealthy products such as candy, chips and cookies, which comprised more than 80% of the options available, while only 5% of the food choices were healthier such as fruits, vegetables, or nuts. Adopting a healthy food and beverage vending policy is a low-cost strategy for employers that can increase access to healthier food and beverages. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2015, nearly 19 million people work for state and local governments meaning increasing healthier options in vending can touch a significant number of lives.



“Providing vending machines with 100% healthy options is a small, but important step as we shift our focus to establishing a healthy recreation environment for the patrons at our sites.”

– Elizabeth Ittner, M.S., Certified Wellness Practitioner and Fitness & Wellness Program Coordinator for Fairfax County Park Authority

The Solution

When implementing a healthy vending plan, the City of Alexandria and the Arlington Department of Parks and Recreation shared policy language along with best practices and lessons learned to adopt a 100% healthy vending policy. In addition, through another unique partnership, the region utilized a local vendor who specializes in making healthier options available and who updated old vending machines. Because of the collaborative efforts and the support of the American Heart Association's Accelerating National Community Health Outcomes through Reinforcing Partnerships (ANCHOR) program, the Fairfax County Park Authority adopted their own vending policy in May 2017.

This policy and vendor relationship extends to all 17 park locations and nine RECenters (recreational centers) in Fairfax County. The collaboration needed to implement this policy was bolstered through the support by the ANCHOR team by conducting educational taste tests, consumer surveys, distributing advertising and marketing materials, hosting planning meetings, and providing expertise on the nutritional guidelines. The AHA assisted with an education campaign to raise awareness about the changes taking place and how they benefit residents and visitors alike.

Sustaining Success

With a healthy vending policy implemented in public buildings and places, Arlington leaders now have their sights set on making concession stand menus healthier at community venues. In Fairfax, community and health organization leaders are working on extending the healthy vending policy beyond county parks and recreation centers. Collaborating partners desire to raise nutrition standards for snacks sold at public schools, government office buildings, and all other county property not covered by the healthy vending policy in Fairfax.

Policy, System and Environmental Change

The three northern Virginia (NoVA) agencies have all adopted the same 100% healthy vending policy to embrace higher nutrition guidelines for their vending machines that exceed federal government recommendations of 75% healthy, for their vending machines.³ The NoVA vendor also created environmental changes by swapping out existing machines with ones that promote health-centered messages. The ANCHOR program provided social media marketing, taste-testing events, and invited employees and community members to engage in a "What's in your vending machine?" educational game to support implementation.

Results

Northern Virginia now offers a wide variety of healthy food and drinks to residents, visitors and employees who utilize the hundreds of vending machines located in the region's municipal buildings, parks and recreation centers. The "100 percent healthy" vending contract adopted by the City of Alexandria has become the model used by neighboring Arlington County, which now has a health vending policy that covers 30 locations, including all its libraries, community centers, government buildings, and outdoor spaces. Most recently, Fairfax replicated Alexandria's vending policy for its park authority, which includes 17 park locations and nine RECenters sites and more than 70 machines. Both the support between municipalities and implementation strategies of the AHA has allowed the most populous region of Virginia to present a unified stance about providing smarter, healthier snack choices in their communities.

Get Involved

Take a closer look at the items sold in the snack and beverage machines in the parks, recreation centers and government buildings you visit. Learn more about the vending policies in your community and the businesses stocking the machines. Check out the vending policies adopted in neighboring communities and ask about the steps being taken in your own backyard to contribute to a healthier environment for the public.