



# ANCHOR

ACCELERATING NATIONAL COMMUNITY HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH REINFORCING PARTNERSHIPS

## CITY OF AUSTIN ADOPTS HEALTHY VENDING



When the City of Austin's vending contract came up for renewal, the city's purchasing and health departments worked closely with the American Heart Association to find healthier snacking options for their community. The results included a policy that outlined nutritional guidelines that either met or exceeded national guidelines, a small but significant step to helping lower obesity, diabetes, and other diet-related illnesses among city employees and residents. Consumers will begin seeing the new, healthier snack and drink options becoming available throughout the summer and fall of 2017.

### The Challenge

Obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the country, and Austin, Texas has not escaped this trend: 57 percent of the residents in Travis County are either overweight or obese. This is both a public health and economic concern. Texas businesses spend about \$9.5 billion annually on obesity-related costs linked to health care and absenteeism, according to the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts. Having healthy food widely available is an important part of making informed nutritional choices, particularly when it comes to buying from vending machines.



**“We wanted to ensure there were a number of low sodium and healthier products in every City of Austin vending machine and we knew there was a demand for healthier options. Adopting healthier vending standards is just another step in our overall commitment to building a culture of health in the City of Austin....”**

– Dr. Philip Huang, Medical Director and Health Authority, Austin Public Health

## The Solution

The City of Austin updated its vending policy to improve the existing nutrition standards for items offered in its machines so they would meet or exceed national recommendations. The negotiation process started in late 2016 as leaders from the City of Austin's health and purchasing departments met to discuss the existing vending contract. City leaders solicited input from the American Heart Association to tap into the organization's knowledge of national nutritional standards, as well as its experience with implementing healthy vending policies in both private and public places. The new vending policy offers more options to the public that reflect the newly adopted nutritional standards for items sold in all vending machines owned by the city or found on city property.

## Sustaining Success

The American Heart Association's Accelerating National Community Health Outcomes through Reinforcing (ANCHOR) Partnerships Austin team partnered with the City of Austin coalition partners to set up taste test opportunities. These events introduced city employees and visitors to the new healthier options becoming available in the city vending machines and provided feedback from consumers on their preferences for healthier options to be made available. The ANCHOR team also provided educational materials to help generate awareness about the new nutritional guidelines and the healthier options now available in the vending machines.

The ANCHOR team also worked with the city's vendor to provide education on the nutrition guidelines and new vending policy to ensure the vendor knew how to assess if a snack meets the guidelines or not. This support assisted the vendor to determine what healthier snack options can be made available when stocking the city's machines.

## Policy, System and Environmental Change

A new healthy vending guidelines policy affects all city government owned and operated machines. The policy helps contribute to improving the food environment throughout the City of Austin by providing healthier, more wholesome snacks and drinks. The American Heart Association's local ANCHOR team's collaboration with the city vendor has helped the business owner to better understand the benefits of selling healthier snack options.



## Results

Austin officials adopted a healthier vending policy for all city-owned and -operated machines. At least 50 percent of the options offered in the snack vending machines must now be lower in calories, sodium, sugar, and saturated fat. In beverage machines, low-calorie options that do not have added sugar must make up at least 65 percent of the products offered on city grounds. Additionally, the City of Austin will place green coil icons by the new items so customers can identify the "healthier" options being offered in the vending machines. The city has also begun taste tests of the healthier items being offered to raise awareness about the new options and educate consumers about their benefits. The new products, along with updated machines, are making their way across the City of Austin, with the potential to have an impact on more than 13,000 city employees and many of the 947,890 residents who visit city property.

## Get Involved

Snack smarter! Check out a vending machine the next time you are inside a city building or on park grounds. Healthy vending policies can become a reality anywhere people live, work or play. To learn how to adopt such a plan, the American Heart Association offers a [Healthy Food and Beverage Toolkit](#) that provides practical steps and suggestions for improving the food environment where you live.