

Components of Effective Nutrition Standards

Jamese Kwele: Welcome to today's webinar, Components of Effective Nutrition Standards presented by The Food Trust and sponsored by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. We are very happy to have you all joining us here today. My name is Jamese Kwele and I'll be presenting today's webinar. I am joined here today by Karen Shore who is a director here at The Food Trust. I serve as program manager in The Food Trust in the Consulting Department where I manage and develop programs spanning a variety of areas including early childhood nutrition, farm to table, and community health.

Before getting started, I'd like to go over some logistics for today's presentation. There will be a Q&A session at the end of the webinar. Please type in your questions in the chat box and they will be answered at the end of the presentation. A question and answer document will be sent to all participants a few days after the webinar with all questions and answers, including any that we do not have time to cover. Also, given the number of participants, all lines are muted. Finally, if you're experiencing any technical difficulties, please use the chat box.

I'd like to begin by telling you a little bit about The Food Trust and our work. The Food Trust is a nationally recognized nonprofit working throughout the United States and internationally to improve access to healthy affordable food. We are based in Philadelphia and we have worked for nearly 25 years to create comprehensive solutions to the issues of food access, working to improve the health of families and communities.

Across the country, The Food Trust is working with local partners to spread the success of our work. In the past year, we've worked on projects in over 23 states from California to Maine. In addition, The Food Trust is a lead partner organization for Voices for Healthy Kids, a collaboration between The American Heart Association and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, working to engage, organize, and mobilize people to improve the health of their communities and reverse the childhood obesity epidemic.

The Food Trust uses a comprehensive approach through which we work to expand access to healthier foods in a variety of settings, increase awareness and knowledge to support making healthier decisions, and help make healthier food more affordable.

In recent years, The Food Trust has begun building out a comprehensive approach in the state of Kansas. Our recent work in the state includes projects and partnerships with the Kansas Health Foundation, The Sunflower Foundation, K-State, and KC Healthy Kids.

Today's webinar is the second in a series of four webinars presented by The Food Trust for CDRRs and 1422 grantees on healthy food environments. In addition, The Food Trust is serving as a technical assistance provider for grantees. We'd like to take a moment to introduce you to our technical assistance team, which is comprised of nine individuals with full reach back to experts throughout the organization.

As you can see, we each have broad areas of expertise in areas such as community engagement and program evaluation and have deep expertise in certain areas that will we will bring to bear in supporting the webinars and technical assistance for this project.

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Karen Shore, Director of Consulting, is the contact for this project. You can reach her at kshore@thefoodtrust.org and we look forward to hearing from you.

All right, let's get started. Today's webinar will discuss components for effective nutrition standards. So, what are nutrition standards or nutrition guidelines? Nutrition guidelines define standards for the foods and beverages that an organization purchases, provides, or makes available. Criteria can be based on nutrition content, food groups, serving size and other factors. Effective standards also use pricing placement and other marketing strategies to make healthy food and beverages more affordable and convenient, as well as educational strategies to build demand for healthier choices among consumers. The adoption of nutrition standards is a policy, systems, and environmental, or PSE strategy. PSE changes typically have a broad impact on the way people live and support frameworks where the easy default choices are healthy as opposed to unhealthy ones. The CDC recommends PSE based approaches for promoting healthy eating behaviors and reducing overconsumption of foods and beverages of low nutritional quality.

There are a variety of reasons why agencies and businesses should consider promoting nutrition standards. One, by implementing nutrition standards, agencies and businesses can work to increase healthy food and beverage options and limit calorically dense nutrient core items. Standards are also a really effective way to reinforce public health messages and model healthy eating. As a result, standards can play an important role in efforts to decrease morbidity and mortality related to obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.

In addition, nutrition standards help agencies and business meet consumer demands. Research demonstrates that demand for healthy options is high among consumers.

Nutrition standards can be promoted and adopted in a variety of settings including, public spaces such as government buildings and facilities, parks and recreation sites, work sites, businesses and stores, hospitals, schools, childcare institutions, and restaurants, as well as a variety of venues in each of those settings.

Let's look at a local example of nutritional standards from Kansas, The Healthy Kansas Hospitals Initiative, where at least 78 hospitals have signed the Healthy Kansas Hospitals pledge and 25 hospitals have made formal policy changes to their food and beverage environments. Let's take a look at a short video about the initiative.

[Audio cuts out 8:06 - 9:53]

All right, sorry everyone for the technical difficulties and we're sorry that you couldn't hear the audio. We're back.

In recent years, nutrition standards have gained a lot of prominence. In addition, there is a growing movement to promote healthy food on government property, which this map illustrates. More than 20 federal departments have implemented the Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations, which were developed by the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the General Services Administration. Additionally, a number of states and municipalities have adopted nutrition standards to benefit

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employees and the general public who purchase and/or are served food and beverages on public property. This is a growing movement that has been supported by a number of key advocates and funding initiatives including The American Heart Association, state and local health departments and CDC chronic disease and sodium reduction funding. And you will see on the map, there are three dots in Kansas. Those examples are from Lawrence, Douglas County; Liberal, Kansas; and the Riley County Fair, Kansas, all of which created standards for vending and concessions.

Nutrition standards are not a completely new concept. In fact, as many of you are likely aware, standards for meals and snacks and competitive foods are the norm in nearly all public schools across the nation. To receive federal reimbursement, school meal programs must offer reimbursable meals that meet the federal nutrition standards based on the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These standards are also referred to as the meal pattern and require schools to offer students the right balance of fruits, vegetables, low fat, or fat-free milk, whole grains, and lean protein with every meal. The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 required the USDA to update these standards for the first time in 15 years. The new regulations require cafeterias to offer more fruit, vegetables, and whole grains, and limit sodium and calories and unhealthy fat in every school meal. To ensure that all foods and beverages sold in schools during the school day are healthy choices, the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act also requires the USDA to create nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold in competition to reimbursable meals. These competitive foods are sold in vending machines, snack bars, and a-la-carte lines. This graphic demonstrates the powerful impact that nutrition standards have had on the nutritional qualities for snacks available to children in schools.

As previously mentioned, school meals are required to meet the nutrition standards established by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. As a bit of background, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, or DGA for short, is a policy document issued by the Health and Human Services and the USDA every five years. The DGA serves as a basis for federal nutrition policy and nutrition education activities in the United States. The most up-to-date guidelines were released just a few months ago in January 2016.

We're going to take a few minutes to summarize the major take-aways from the 2015 to 2020 DGAs, as these will inform our understanding of the criteria most often used in nutrition standards.

The first DGA was released in 1980. Over the years, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans have shifted from messages focusing on individual foods and single nutrients to ones promoting overall eating styles designed to reduce the risk of diet-related chronic disease and help ensure nutrient adequacy. These eating styles are referred to as eating patterns. The healthy eating patterns promoted by the current DGA include a variety of nutritious foods like vegetables, fruits, greens, low-fat dairy, lean protein, and oils while limiting saturated fats, trans fats, added sugar, and sodium. The DGA also emphasizes that a healthy eating pattern is adaptable to a person's taste preferences, traditions, culture, and budget.

Let's drill down a bit and take a look at a few of these specific guidelines in the 2015 DGA, some of which are new or modified from previous editions. This edition of the DGA recommends limiting intake of added sugar to less than 10 percent of total calories per day. For a

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2,000-calorie diet, that would translate into about 50 grams or 10 teaspoons of sugar. Most Americans consume the equivalent of 30 to 40 teaspoons or more of sugar per day. Most of this sugar comes from foods and beverages to which sugar has been added like soda, candies and baked goods. A can of soda alone contains 10 teaspoons of added sugar. So if you had a can of soda, you've had as much added sugar as is healthy for the day. Naturally occurring sugars, such as those found in an apple or a glass of milk are not included in the less than 10 percent a day recommendations. Naturally occurring sugars affect the body differently because they come as part of a whole food package including fiber and other nutrients. We don't need to watch our intake of these sugars except as part of our overall calories. The added sugars recommendation is new for this edition of the DGA. Sugar is not a new topic, but this particular recommendation to limit to less than 10 percent is new.

For fats, this is also not a new topic. The advice on fats is really similar to the previous edition. When it comes to fats, fats are not inherently bad. It's often said, "Fats are like fonts; it's the type that matters the most." Healthy fats, such as those pictured in the photo, consumed in moderation are integral parts of healthy eating patterns.

Cholesterol, this is another not new topic, however interestingly for this edition of the DGA, the recommendation is very different from past editions, which recommended limiting cholesterol intake. The 2015 DGA actually makes no recommendation to limit cholesterol stating that, "adequate evidence is not available for a quantitative limit for dietary cholesterol specific to the dietary guidelines." So you might be wondering why this change. There's simply isn't strong evidence that limiting cholesterol-rich foods lowers amounts of artery clogging LDL cholesterol that ends up in the blood. So for those who like eggs, you don't have to worry so much about eating them anymore.

This edition of the DGA, Dietary Guidelines for Americans, gives us a modified recommendation for sodium. The previous edition of the dietary guidelines recommended two different limits for sodium intakes for different segments of the population. This edition of the DGA recommends everyone limit sodium intake to less than 2300 milligrams per day. For comparison, the average sodium intake for Americans is 3400 milligrams per day, which is an excessive amount that raises blood pressure and possesses health risks. For reference, 2300 milligrams is equal to about 3/4 teaspoons of salt.

Coffee and caffeine. The inclusion of caffeine and coffee as topics in the DGA is actually unprecedented. In fact, the previous DGA made no recommendation on coffee consumption. This time around, the DGA committee report mentioned both coffee and caffeine several hundred times. This is good news for coffee lovers. Three to five cups of coffee, or up to 400 milligrams of caffeine per day, are considered part of a healthy eating pattern.

These are the 2015 key recommendations from the DGA, but let's just zero in on the last bullet point. Everyone has a role in helping to create and support healthy eating patterns in multiple settings nationwide from home, to school, to work, to the community. This statement is very much relevant to today's webinar. The DGA is calling on everyone from all sectors of society to support the creation of a new paradigm in which healthy choices are easy, accessible, affordable, and normative. This means that everyone, including state and municipal governments, food

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manufacturers, restaurants, schools, hospitals, stores and many others have a role to play in fostering communities that encourage healthful eating patterns and supporting environments where healthy foods are accessible and affordable. Adopting and promoting nutrition standards is a powerful and effective way for agencies, institutions, and businesses to contribute to improving access to healthy foods and create healthier environments where the healthy choice is the easy choice.

Let's take a look at some components for effective standards. Nutrition standards can be implemented across a variety of settings. No matter what the setting or venue, a few common themes emerge in terms of the types of food and nutrients that are promoted and those that are reduced. Much of this, as you will see, aligns with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans in terms of the foods that are typically promoted in nutrient standards, like fruits and vegetables, of course, whole grains, low-fat dairy, lean protein, healthy fats, and water consumption. In addition, nutrient standards typically promote reduced consumption of calories, saturated fats, and trans fat, sodium, and added sugars.

It's important to note that effective standards will do more than define what can and cannot be served or sold. In order to be effective, nutrition standards really also need to make healthy choices more accessible, more appealing, and more affordable. Across various settings and venues, nutrition standards are most effective when they incorporate behavioral economic strategies to nudge people to make healthier food choices. They make the healthy choice the easy choice.

Let's look at some examples of some behavioral economic strategies. Behavioral economics is really the study of how physical and social environments influence choices. A lot of research that relates to food choices and behavioral economics come out of the Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University. Research has shown that most of our decisions about food are mindless, meaning automatic or unthinking, and largely influenced by the environment. We often don't even realize that we're being influenced. We are particularly susceptible when we are in an emotional or hot state, for example when we're hungry. This is why we're more likely to preorder a healthy meal a day ahead rather than order it when we're hungry. The good news is that we can use various strategies to plan eating spaces and habits to nudge us to make healthier choices. As shown here, a couple of strategies that can be used in a variety of settings. We can prompt people to grab a piece of fruit at checkout. We can increase the visibility of healthier items. People are more likely to buy what they see first.

Defaults are another strategy to increase healthy choices. When we talk about defaults, we're talking about what automatically comes with a meal, for example a burger with a side of fries and a soda. Many large restaurant chains have worked to change defaults, particularly for children's meals, to healthier options like fruits or veggies as the default sides and water or low-fat milk as the default beverage instead of soda. This is great because research shows that people generally stick with default options. So in a variety of settings, default strategies could include things like offering water as a default beverage in a cafeteria, again fruits and vegetables as a default side, defaulting to the smaller portion size unless a larger size is requested, et cetera.

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Choice architecture, as this drawing illustrates, is simply the act of designing a choice to favor one option. So how can we get Homer Simpson to choose healthy fruits over doughnuts? Choice architecture might be the solution.

The four Ps of marketing. Marketing is a strategy to attract and retain customers by creating product value, both real and perceived, through four key areas called the marketing matrix, product, place, price, and promotion. We've already touched the product, place, and promotion, so I'll just quickly mention that nutrition standards sometimes will include efforts to lower the price of healthier options to make them more desirable.

There are a number of model policies that can be used or adapted for use. I've listed some here and a document will be provided with a link to each of these. If you're interested in checking out any of these, I highly recommend taking a close look at the standards that were developed by the State of Washington. They have created standards for multiple settings including cafeterias, vending, meetings and events, and institutions. We also want you to keep in mind that it's not necessary to recreate the wheel and develop a totally new set of standards. It is recommended rather that agencies choose one of these or other model policies and adapt them for use.

Let's take a look at what standards look like in various settings for packaged foods. These settings include vending machines, small stores, and pantries. As we discussed in the previous webinar, corner stores, small stores, and other food retail settings are key places in communities to work to establish nutrition standards. Store certification programs are effective ways to work with small food retail establishments to improve the nutritional quality of foods made available for purchase. These certification programs often utilize product menus, define the types of products a store needs to stock to participate in the program, and in some cases qualify for incentives. This usually does not result in a store of course no longer stocking less healthier items, but rather supports stores in adding healthier options such as fruits and veggies, whole grains, low-fat dairy, water, healthy snacks, and other nutritious options. As the before and after photos illustrate on this slide, stores are also encouraged to use the four Ps of marketing to make those healthier options more appealing, more accessible, and more affordable for a consumer.

Another strategy that can be employed with packaged foods in various settings is using marketing materials to categorize products, using a Go, Slow, and Whoa labeling system. As you can see here, the green products are the Go, or healthiest. The yellow are the Slow, or healthier items. And the red are the Whoa, or limited items.

Vending machine standards are often an easy entry point for agencies and institutions that want to implement standards. Effective vending machine standards should reduce the availability of sugar-sweetened beverages, promote water, and use criteria for products stocked, product placement, portion size, promotional space, and calorie labeling.

A few best practices for vending machines. You would want to address portion size by making requirements per package rather than per serving. In terms of placement, place more nutritious items at eye level. Use stickers or other promotional materials to highlight the healthiest choices. Of course include criteria, as we discussed, for nutrients to reduce such as sodium, fats, and sugar. Some vending machines standards will require that total calories for each item be

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prominently listed on the front of the machine. For a beverage machine, you might consider a wrap or advertising that covers the machine itself. And the standard would require that any advertising on the machine feature water or 100 percent juice. In terms of pricing strategy, a best practice is to ensure that the price of water is less than soda to make it a more appealing choice. Pictured here is a plan-o-gram in which you would ensure that first, there's a good mix of healthy options, and then those healthy options are put at eye level where they are more likely to be seen.

Food pantries are another setting in which to promote nutrition standards. Pantries can improve the nutritional qualities of foods that food-insecure families are able to take home by defining the criteria for healthier food items the pantry would like to provide to clients, and then educating donors and the wider public about the healthier food items that are most needed or most requested. Some pantries develop standards that also define items that they would not accept, such as soda. Another model called the Choice Pantry is set up like a small market. And these Choice Pantries can use choice architecture and other behavioral economic strategies previously discussed to encourage clients to select healthier items.

Now, let's talk about nutritional standards for meals and other prepared foods in settings such as cafeterias, restaurants, and at meetings and events. Some common things we'll find for standards across various settings include integrating promotions, placement, and product mix to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Meal standards should also promote the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, water, include calories labeling, and healthy food preparation methods. Prepared food standards should limit portion sizes, sodium, sugar, and fried foods.

Standards for meals in cafeterias, restaurants, and at meeting events often include nutrition criteria for both food groups to limit and food groups to promote. The nutrition standards shown here are based on criteria formulated by experts convened by the Rand Corporation, who developed nutrition performance standards for restaurant meals with the goal of reducing the risk of certain chronic diseases. Most standards for preparing meals you will come across will be very similar to these standards.

Voluntary healthy restaurant programs, such as the two shown here, encourage restaurants to offer healthy menu items in exchange for free publicity and other incentives. These programs are often sponsored by a local department of health. Restaurants can be certified as healthier by adopting some or all of the guidelines to meet a specified threshold. Programs such as these are more effective when the criteria for participation can be realistically met by restaurants and evaluated by implementing agencies. If you take a look at these two examples, the first example, the standards defined by Por Vida in San Antonio, Texas would require restaurants to complete nutritional analysis of prepared meals, which may prove to be too expensive for many local restaurants. On contrast, in the second example, Choose Healthy LA, they are offering healthy criteria that restaurants can easily incorporate into their menus without a lot of added cost.

Finally, another place to institute standards is for meetings and events. These are another easy entry point for promoting standards. We can think about things like providing water at breaks and meals or allowing the participants to preorder their meals. As we mentioned before, people tend to choose healthier options when they preorder. Using attractive descriptive names for

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healthier items and regular titles for less healthy options. For buffets, putting the healthier options at the beginning of the line, labeling food and beverage options that meet the guidelines, and providing healthy portion sizes.

Now that we have a good understanding of the components for effective standards, the next step is to start to think about implementation strategies. The next webinar will help cover topics related to implementation strategies such as, “

- How do you identify decision makers and approval mechanisms to implement new policies in your agency or organization?
- What are the pros and cons of voluntary versus mandatory standards?
- What is the Randolph Sheppard Act and how may it impact implementation?
- What are some best practices for communicating standards to consumers?

These questions and more will be covered in the next webinar next month in May.

We've covered a lot of information and now we'd like to give you the opportunity to ask any question you may have. [end of audio]