

Restock Our Future™

Tips for Healthy Food Choices in Public Places Messaging

- ✓ Focus on the increasing consumer demand for healthy food and the health benefits of providing kids and families with access to healthy options in public places. One of the most common opposition arguments is that even if healthy food is available no one will buy it. But consumer demand is increasing and businesses are changing their offerings. Public places should follow suit.
- ✓ Another common opposition message is that it should be up to vendors to decide what they sell, so when asked about how offering healthy food financially impacts vendors or vending machine companies, point out that it's a smart business strategy because many vendors and companies are receiving requests for healthier food and drinks directly from their customers and they are likely missing out on customers by not offering those options.
- ✓ Emphasize the lack of availability of healthy options and a desire for more choice. Stress that it's about adding more options, rather than taking anything away.
- ✓ If asked about government regulation as a way to ensure public places provide healthier food and beverage options, say that it's smart for governments to take the lead on making sure people have access to the healthy food and beverages they want. Remind people that the government is an employer and all employers have the opportunity to help their employees live healthier, which can lead to better workplace morale and lower health care costs.

Healthy Food Choices in Public Places Messages (*Use key messages consistently and repeatedly)

- ★ Right now, there are few, if any, healthy food and beverage options available in many public places, like parks, recreation centers, and other state and city buildings. But as many people try to eat healthier, the demand for healthier options is increasing.
 - Millions of children and families who visit and work in public places should have access to healthier options.
 - Providing healthier options will give parents healthier choices for their children when they're visiting their favorite local park or recreation center.
- What we eat and drink impacts our health, but we tend to eat what is easily available. Making healthy food and beverages available in public places lets children and families eat healthy, decreasing their risk for heart disease and diabetes.
- States and localities should lead by example. They spend money on nutrition education, wellness, and other disease prevention programs, so it just makes sense that they should support these programs by offering healthier food and beverages in public places. This way, children and families build healthier habits and help save money in the long run.

Language to Emphasize/Language to Avoid

Messages that resonate best are clear and simple. They use everyday language free of jargon and communicate shared values and emotion. Below you'll find a list of words/phrases Voices for Healthy Kids encourages you to use (left-hand column) when talking about healthy food choices in public places. Language in the right-hand column includes terms and phrases not as easily understood or impactful when looking to engage your audience.

Use This Language	Instead of This Language
✓ Healthier food choices for public places; healthy vending, healthy cafeterias	✗ Procurement; public property
✓ More healthy options/choices	✗ Restricting, eliminating, or replacing unhealthy choices
✓ An opportunity to create healthier options in public places	✗ Government regulation
✓ Helping children grow up at a healthy weight	✗ Preventing childhood obesity
✓ Eating healthy and being physically active helps prevent diabetes and heart disease	✗ Eating healthy and being physically active helps prevent childhood obesity

Tips for Effective Messaging to Support Public Policy Change

- 1 Connect with supporters.**

When communicating to gain support for policy, systems, and environmental changes that help kids grow up at a healthy weight, it is important to use language that will move people to take action. By framing your message in a way that paints a picture of how the current environment makes it difficult, if not impossible, to make healthy choices, you can create a sense of urgency and the need to take action. Make sure to clarify that the change and action you're calling for is about transforming environments to make it easy for people to eat healthy and be physically active and less about creating personal behavior change.
- 2 Use the right words.**

While obesity is a chronic disease, most people still think of it as a personal problem with a personal solution. They believe if someone is obese or overweight, that person just needs to eat less and be more physically active. They don't immediately see the need for public policy solutions. However, when talking about people facing obesity-related diseases like diabetes and heart disease, most people agree that we need to work together to find a solution to the problem. Avoid using "obesity" and instead emphasize the health threats posed by heart disease and/or diabetes.
- 3 Emphasize choice.**

People are most supportive of healthy changes if they don't fear their choices will be limited. When talking about adding healthy options, stress the array of overall choices offered to people, especially parents who we are here to support, so the focus is not on the removal of unhealthy options.
- 4 Use the right messenger.**

Messages are only as strong as the person delivering them. Is the person delivering the message credible? Are they representative of the community most affected? Do they have personal experience related to the issue? Are they respected by the audience? The best messenger needs to be determined for each situation and location. For example, when messaging on health issues, the best messenger could be a doctor, a nurse, or a patient. Make informed decisions about the most culturally appropriate messenger on an issue.
- 5 Stress consumer education as ONE piece of the puzzle.**

People believe education is the best way to encourage behavior change. But helping all children grow up at a healthy weight is a complex challenge and education is only one part of the solution. Reinforce consumer education as key to awareness building about the problem and solutions, but emphasize other initiatives that drive system-wide policy change. For example, with tobacco use, warning labels did a great deal to educate consumers but the change in norms and dramatic drops in smoking rates happened when environmental changes happened like prohibiting the sale to minors and making workplaces smoke-free.
- 6 Alleviate skepticism and build trust.**

People are very skeptical of government and framing our solutions only from that lens can prevent us from getting our message through to key audiences. Introduce policy, systems, and environmental change efforts to the public with words like "services," "resources," "partnerships," as people are more inclined to embrace this terminology instead of "regulations," "mandates," "bans," "funding," and "government."