

NCCDPHP Success Story

Reducing Sodium in Hospital Food Service Operations Across Southern California



At A Glance

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) and the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) have partnered with nine public and private hospitals to implement comprehensive nutrition standards (e.g., calorie and sodium limits for meals and snacks served and sold) and other practices to buy and promote healthy foods. These unique regional partnerships have led to healthier choices for hospital patrons.

By Brenda Robles

Public Health Challenge

Diet-related chronic diseases such as heart disease are a major public health issue in Southern California. For example, almost a third of Los Angeles County adults have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, according to the 2017 California Health Interview Survey. Eating foods high in sodium can lead to high blood pressure, which is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Improving the availability of lower-sodium food offerings in settings such as hospital cafeterias, snack shops, and patient meals, can improve dietary behaviors among diverse populations at risk for high blood pressure and other chronic conditions. Yet many hospital food service operations struggle to offer these healthier foods because of limited staff or infrastructure to alter menu items and concerns about patrons not being receptive to changes.

Approach

Since 2016, the Los Angeles County DPH and County of San Diego HHSA have worked together to improve the nutritional quality of foods served and sold in Southern California hospitals. Los Angeles County DPH partnered with Children's Hospital Los Angeles to implement a hospital nutrition policy that includes sodium limits for patient meals and foods served/sold in cafeterias. Los Angeles and San Diego Counties have similar partnerships with City of Hope National Medical Center and Rady Children's Hospital, respectively. In addition to helping these hospitals change their nutrition policies, the public health partners trained staff in food preparation.

The recent changes have shown increased consumption of healthier items. The Food Service team at CHLA are excited to implement the next phases of the new Nutrition Guidelines.

- Jane Tsukamoto, Sodexo Services

Results

These partnerships have improved the procurement of lower-sodium ingredients, increased the development of new low-sodium menu items, and promoted lower-sodium foods to patrons. For example, at Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, four new grain-based salads averaging less than 50 mg sodium and four new grab-and-go wraps averaging less than 600 mg were added. From November 2018 to April 2019, consumption of fresh whole fruit increased by over 15% and of water increased by 62%. At City of Hope, achievements included replacement of six high-sodium ingredients, resulting in an average sodium decrease of 58% for affected ingredients. At Rady Children's, 20% of menu ingredients exceeded sodium limits outlined by Good Choice food purchasing criteria standards, and lower-sodium substitutions were recommended for 46 of these higher-sodium items.

What's Next

The County of San Diego HHSA is working with Rady Children's to lower the sodium content of the 46 menu items recommended for substitution. Los Angeles and San Diego Counties will also continue to cultivate partnerships with hospitals and other venues (e.g., universities) to help them buy lower-sodium ingredients and improve the nutritional quality of foods served. Also, more fresh, visually appealing plant-based foods will be made available to their consumers, and the Eat Your Best educational campaign will be expanded in hospital cafeterias and university food venues to promote the consumption of these foods.

Find Out More

You can also partner with hospitals and other venues to increase the availability of healthier, lower-sodium foods in their cafeterias and other food establishments.

Check out the Los Angeles County DPH Eat Your Best website to download free information and resources:

<http://www.choosehealthla.com/eat/eatyourbest>

Contact

Brenda Robles

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
3530 Wilshire Blvd, FI 8

Los Angeles, CA 90010

Phone: 213-351-7828

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Web site

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

CDC-INFO

<https://wwwn.cdc.gov/dcs/ContactUs/Form>

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

