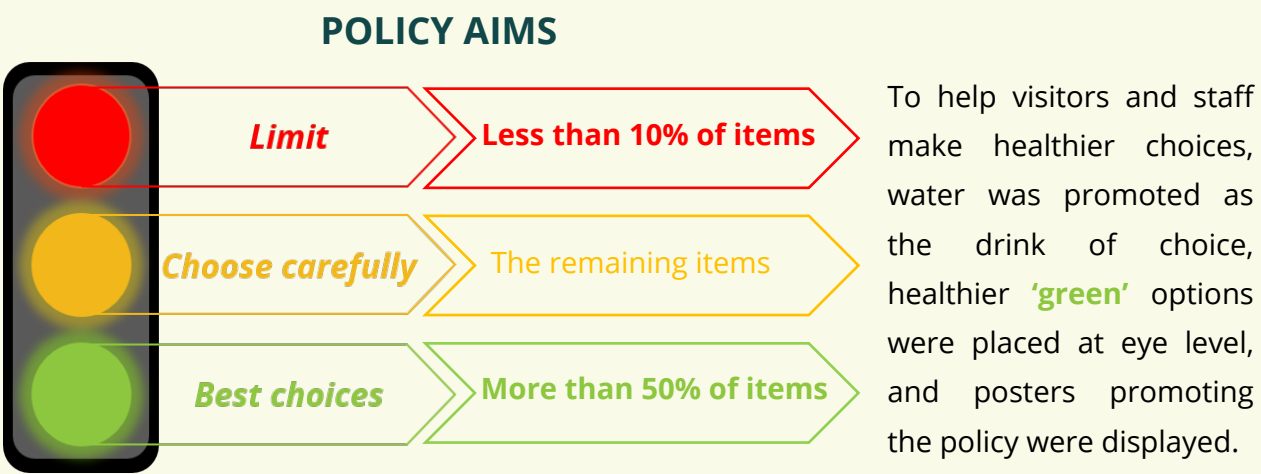


Evaluation of the introduction of the YMCA healthy food and beverage policy

YMCA Victoria – one of the state’s largest aquatic and recreation facility managers – introduced a Healthy Food and Beverage Policy to provide their visitors and staff with healthier food and drink choices. YMCA centres implemented the policy in their cafes and canteens over a two-year period from December 2014. All food and drinks were classified by their ingredients and nutrition information as ‘red’, ‘amber’ or ‘green’ using the Victorian Government [‘Healthy choices: food and drink classification guide’](#). The availability of items for sale was then changed to meet these policy aims:



Thirteen centres were included in this evaluation. Monthly sales data from January 2013 to December 2018 was used to evaluate how the policy impacted customers’ purchasing of ‘red’, ‘amber’ and ‘green’ foods and drinks, expressed as both sales value and volume. We also calculated the nutritional content of the products purchased so we could see changes in the total amount of fat and sugar sold each month. For each outcome and centre, we compared the mean value of outcomes between post- to pre-policy implementation periods, which were then pooled using random effect meta-analyses.

“ With over 15 million visits to YMCA facilities annually, and 58,000 swimming lessons across Victoria every week, we are in a position to positively influence the food choices and eating behaviours of children and families through improving the food and drinks we offer. Through the policy, we aim to provide healthier options and reduce the prevalence of junk food in the communities we work with. ”

Health Promotion Manager, YMCA

RESULTS

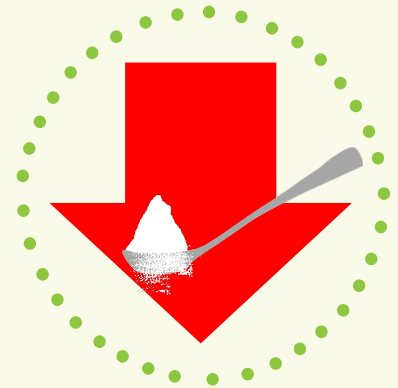
Over the six-year period, more than 3.6 million food and drink items were sold. Among other outcomes, introducing the policy resulted in:



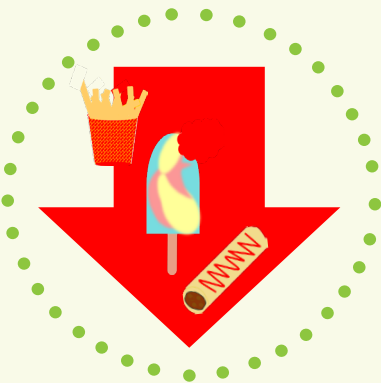
37% fewer 'red' drinks by volume



25% more 'green' drinks by volume



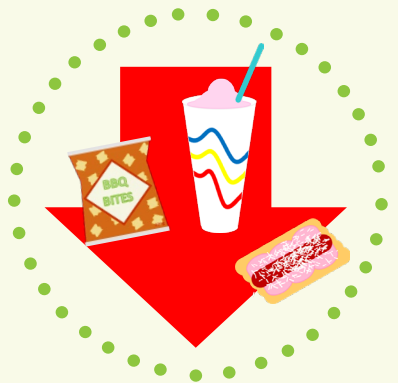
2% less sugar in drinks, and 5% less sugar in foods



15% fewer 'red' foods by volume



No change to revenue from food



Decreased energy density of foods (1.4 kJ/g), and drinks (0.32 kJ/g), sold

“ One of the biggest challenges our centres have faced in transitioning to healthier menus, is sourcing healthier food and drinks. Because many of our canteens don’t have commercial kitchens, we rely upon pre-prepared and packaged options. Solving the healthier food procurement challenge is going to be key to the sustainability of our policy and wider efforts to transition to healthier food environments. ”

Health Promotion Manager, YMCA

KEY LEARNINGS

- 1 A healthy food and drink policy can lead to customers and staff making healthier food & drink choices in recreation centres.
- 2 Recreation centre policies can contribute to reducing sugar consumption from sugary drinks.
- 3 Introduction of a healthy food and drink policy can reduce the amount of sugar purchased in food, and the energy density of food and drinks sold.
- 4 Alternative suppliers may need to be sought to source appropriate pre-prepared or packaged ‘green’ and ‘amber’ classified food items.
- 5 This is the first study to find that revenue from food did not change following the introduction of a comprehensive healthy food and drink policy.
- 6 A separate project found that customers attending the centres were largely unaware to changes in soft drink availability, though 89% of customers surveyed believed that the centres should continue to improve the healthiness of items offered, indicating customer acceptance.

CONTACT US

For more information on this project please contact re-fresh@deakin.edu.au.

This research summary is based on: Naughton SS*, Romaniuk H*, Peeters A, Chung A, Jerebine A, Orellana L and Boelsen-Robinson T (2023) 'Evaluation of the introduction of a healthy food and drink policy in 13 community recreation centres on the healthiness and nutrient content of customer purchases and business outcomes: An observational study', *PLoS One*, 18(7):e0288719, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0288719> *joint first authors



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This project was made possible with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health Boosting Prevention program funded by Medical Research Future Fund.