



# Creating Change: Healthy Eating Environment in AHS

Strategies and Ideas for  
AHS Leaders and Teams





# Introduction

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is leading the way to helping Albertans make healthy eating the easy choice. The [Healthy Eating Environment Policy](#) supports healthy food and drink options in AHS (<https://extranet.ahsnet.ca/teams/policydocuments/1/clp-ahs-pol-healthy-eating.pdf>).

## Why Are We Doing This?

As a health organization and as health leaders, AHS wants to lead by example. Healthy eating is an important part of promoting health and preventing and managing chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes and cancer. Teaching people what and how much to eat is not enough. Having healthier food choices makes it easier to eat for health.

AHS needs to model healthy eating so that our actions (the environment) support what we are recommending to patients, clients and staff. AHS leaders, staff, physicians, volunteers and the public have told us that leading and role modeling healthy eating is the right thing to do for a health organization.

## It takes all of us

Together we can make the gradual shift to a healthy eating environment.

Each area within AHS needs a plan to move forward. Changes, whether big or small, will help AHS create a healthy eating environment. Engage staff, visitors, patients and others in the planning process.



# Strategies and Ideas

## Creating an action plan

- A. Build a team to work together on creating changes.** Include members from areas that provide food and drinks, such as outlets and franchises, catering, vending, volunteers, and auxiliaries. Also invite staff, patients, public and other key stakeholders from facilities/sites to join the team. Processes and tools from the Alberta Health Services Improvement Way (AIW) can be used to make changes.
  
- B. Assess the current state in your venue/site/facility/zone.** Use the assessment of Healthy Eating in Our Organization tool.  
[www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/nutrition/if-nfs-hee-assessment-of-organization.pdf](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/nutrition/if-nfs-hee-assessment-of-organization.pdf)



**C. Engage the team and other key stakeholders to brainstorm changes that are needed.**

Use these questions as a guide:

- What are we doing now in our site/facility/zone to support a healthy eating environment? What are some of our past and present successes? (defining what is)
- What would a healthy eating environment look like in our site/facility/zone? (casting the vision)
- What small change(s) could we make that would have the biggest impact on creating a healthy eating environment right now? (design)
- What bold change(s) could we make in our site/facility/zone that would have a big impact on creating a healthy eating environment in AHS? (destiny/action plan)
- What supports do you need to make these changes?

**D. Continue to invite team members as needed.**

**E. Develop action plan(s) for your area/site/facility/zone.**

- Include targets to measure progress.

**F. Begin making changes.**

**G. Monitor and evaluate the action plans against the targets identified.**

- Celebrate successes.
- Adjust and add to action plan as needed.

**H. Share your story to inspire others in AHS.**



## Changes to work towards

- Phase in [AHS Nutrition Guidelines for Foods and Beverages in Food Outlets](#) in all food outlets. Make sure changes are consistent across all food venues in a site.
- Change systems and processes in order to provide healthy foods and drinks (for example, remove deep fryers or make space available for meal breaks).
- Market healthy food and drinks (for example, offer healthy options in vending machines or make healthy options more visible where food is sold).
- Promote healthy eating through education, so that healthy eating is not just the easy choice, but also the preferred choice.
- Increase access to healthy foods in AHS (for example, at meetings, appreciation events and after hours).

## Ideas for leaders and teams

### Time and space for healthy eating:

- Schedule meetings outside of mealtimes to allow meal breaks.
- Create healthy food zones in common areas where healthy foods can be shared.
- Ensure eating areas are available with tables, seats, refrigerator, microwave and sink.
- Consider adding an outdoor eating area, such as picnic tables or benches, for use during warmer months.
- Ensure there are bins for garbage and recycling near eating areas.



## Increase access to healthy foods:

- Arrange or request healthy catering at meetings, events and conferences ([Eat Smart Meet Smart](#)).
  - Provide milk for coffee/tea.
  - Offer smaller portion sizes of foods and drinks.
  - Offer whole grains and more vegetables and fruits.
- Ensure healthy foods are offered in easy to access locations (for example, food carts and healthy vending machines).
- Host onsite farmers markets during the growing season.
- Consider using the facility's outdoor space for edible gardens.

## Celebrations and rewards:

- Organize staff appreciation event with healthy catering or potluck.
- Encourage potlucks with healthy foods and drinks.
- Include healthy foods at birthday and retirement events (for example, if cake is served, offer smaller portions and serve fruit).
- Work with staff to decide how often events will happen.
- Use healthy food or non-food fundraisers.
- Use non-food rewards and recognition (for example, AHS ecards, bulletin board with photos, cards, announcements, flowers).
- Select healthier food choices if using food to show appreciation or recognition.



## Promote healthy eating:

- Display [Healthy Eating Starts Here](#) posters.
- Encourage staff to access healthy eating resources from [Human Resources – Health & Wellness](#) on Insite (AHS Internal website).
- Host a kickoff event with healthy foods.
- Invite senior leaders to attend wellness events.
- Celebrate successes toward a healthy eating environment.
- Organize a [Healthy Eating Challenge](#) within your team or between areas or sites.
- Encourage staff to [champion healthy eating](#) through the AHS Wellness Champion Network.
- Communicate about changes being made through staff meetings, email, newsletters and bulletin boards. Include success stories and pictures.
- Ask for feedback from staff, patients and visitors about changes.
- Share ideas with other facilities/sites/zones.
- Role model healthy eating.

For more information, resources and success stories, visit:

[www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page5234.aspx](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page5234.aspx)

or contact: [healthyeatingenvironment@ahs.ca](mailto:healthyeatingenvironment@ahs.ca)