



BUILDING HEALTHIER FOOD ENVIRONMENTS within Recreation Spaces

Recreation spaces are a gathering place and community hub for people of all ages. They are key community settings that can have a positive impact on the health and behaviour of all residents. They are an ideal location to promote a healthy food environment as they already support physical activity and active lifestyles.

The Ontario Government set the goal to reduce childhood obesity by 20%. Local public health units are aiming to partner with their communities to target all environments in which children live, play and learn to create supportive food environments conducive to healthy living. Recreation spaces are one of these identified environments.

There are many benefits to be gained by recreation centres, operators and facility staff by offering healthy foods and enhancing the healthy food environment within a recreation space, including:

- Contributing to the overall health of patrons
- Becoming a leader in promoting health and wellness in the community
- Increasing profitability and broadening customer base
- Building partnerships with coaches, community members, parents and young athletes
- Receiving positive media attention

What are the components of a healthy food environment within recreation spaces?

A healthy food environment exists when there is promotion of healthy eating through both words AND actions. The components consider all elements of the food environment including food and beverage sales (vending machines, canteens/concessions, restaurants, catering), meetings, recreation programs, fundraising and advertising on site. It means going beyond educating patrons about healthy eating and using a comprehensive approach to create a supportive environment that makes the healthy choice the easy choice.

Our communities deserve supportive environments that offer opportunities for both active living and making healthy food choices. This resource outlines different ways we can create a healthier food environment within recreation spaces.





Essential Elements of a Healthy Recreation Food Environment

Commitment to building a positive healthy eating culture

- Key stakeholders (management and/or concession operators) foster the creation of a healthy food environment by demonstrating commitment to achieving the essential elements
- The recreation space collaborates with the local public health unit to develop healthy eating marketing initiatives, programs and policies to support the wellbeing of the surrounding community
- Key stakeholders form partnerships with community groups who can help to advance a positive healthy eating culture in recreation spaces (e.g., recreation associations, local sports teams, parents, municipalities, local public health units)

Supportive social environment

- Praise and non-food based incentives are used as rewards to recognize physical activity engagement, athletic performance and for celebrations
- Fundraising and marketing initiatives support and encourage healthy eating
- Key child influencers (e.g., parents, coaches, instructors, sports associations) demonstrate consistent and positive role modeling of physical activity and healthy eating
- Recreation space is welcoming and supportive of breastfeeding mothers

Access to nutritious, reasonably priced, culturally appropriate food

- Food and beverages served and sold on site are nutritious, competitively priced and reflect the cultural diversity of the community

- Meetings, programs and events for patrons and staff encourage healthy eating and support environmentally-friendly initiatives
- Local foods are offered first and opportunities are considered to build sustainable community partnerships for food distribution

Credible, consistent health messaging and support for recreation space staff and users

- Nutrition and health information and educational opportunities are provided by a Registered Dietitian and/or public health staff
- Concession operators consult with a public health Registered Dietitian regarding food and beverage selection

Safe food practices

- The recreation space adheres to food safety regulations
- Opportunities are provided for recreation space staff and volunteers to participate in food safety and safe food handling workshops offered by the local public health unit

Nutrition policies that encourage a positive healthy eating environment

- A nutrition policy is developed that supports the essential elements of a healthy recreation food environment. The policy provides direction and establishes commitment to working toward a healthy food environment within the recreation space and can be used as a tool for collaboration



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