

## Creating Healthier Food Environments in Irish Healthcare Settings

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The healthcare sector, being one of the largest employers in many countries, increasingly recognises its leadership role in serving as public health role models as well as health promotion advocates. In an effort to promote the health and wellbeing of those working and visiting healthcare facilities, and to act as an exemplar across the public service by improving the food environment in healthcare settings, the Irish Health Service Executive (HSE) introduced a healthier vending policy in 2014 and a calorie posting policy in 2015. Given that approximately 60% of HSE staff work shifts, requiring them to eat multiple meals and snacks within the workplace environment, the need for environments that actively promote and enable healthier choices through effective policies and behavioural interventions was identified. This project set out to review and update the HSE's food and beverage environment policies while also providing evidence-based recommendations on effective behavioural interventions and policy measures. This work will contribute to the HSE's goal of promoting and enabling healthy eating through practical, implementable measures in healthcare settings.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The aim is to produce evidence-informed approaches for creating healthier food and beverage environments in HSE facilities that promote and enable healthier food and beverage choices among staff, visitors, and patients. The objectives include:

- To review recent scientific evidence of behavioural interventions and policy measures in promoting healthier choices in healthcare settings.
- To update and expand the HSE Healthier Vending Policy to incorporate fresh and chilled food options while promoting environmental sustainability through the reduction of single-use plastics, based on current evidence and best practices.
- To update the HSE Calorie Posting Policy to ensure alignment with current evidence on policy design, components and implementation approaches.

### **Design/Methods**

The study was divided into three work packages. The first work package involved a rapid review to examine the effectiveness of behavioural interventions and policy measures in promoting healthier food and beverage choices in healthcare settings. The second work package included updating and expanding the HSE Healthier Vending Policy to include fresh and chilled foods while promoting environmental sustainability through the reduction of single-use plastics. The policy update was informed by multiple evidence sources, including relevant evidence on vending interventions identified from work package one. Work package three focused on the HSE Calorie Posting Policy to ensure it reflects current evidence on policy design, components and implementation approaches. The policy update was informed by

multiple evidence sources, including relevant evidence identified from work package one and findings from implementation research in healthcare settings.

### **Public Patient Involvement**

A Healthier Food Environment Advisory group that included catering managers in health care settings were actively involved in proposing, discussing and agreeing on revisions to the policy documents.

### **Results**

Recommendations and revisions to the HSE Healthier Vending Policy and the HSE Calorie Posting Policy have been submitted to the HSE. A journal article focusing on the rapid review is in preparation.

### **Dissemination**

The updated policy documents are awaiting final sign-off before dissemination.

### **Knowledge Translation**

To be conducted in 2026.