

Promoting and supporting Healthy food & drink choices hospital and healthcare facilities



Healthy food and drink choices in public sector healthcare settings for staff and visitors

Frequently asked questions

Obesity – limiting the impact of unhealthy food and drinks on children

As part of a suite of actions focussed on school, healthcare, and children's sport and recreation settings, COAG Health Council has endorsed the *Minimum National Nutrition Standards for Healthier Food and Drink Choices in Public Sector Healthcare Settings* (minimum standards).

These frequently asked questions (FAQs) should be read in conjunction with:

1. 'Call to Action' which highlights the importance of healthcare facilities to encourage healthier food and drink choices for visitors and staff; and
2. 'Goals, principles and minimum national nutrition standards' which ensure that the availability and promotion of food and drinks in healthcare facilities is consistent with the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

Why are minimum standards for healthier food and drink choices in public sector healthcare settings needed?

Healthy eating throughout all life stages is key to the prevention of obesity and chronic disease which is costing the Australian health system 27 billion dollars a year. The community expects healthcare facilities to offer healthy food and drink choices for their staff and visitors. The current widespread availability of unhealthy food and drinks in healthcare settings conflicts with both healthcare objectives and community expectations.

Australian governments (state and territory health departments and public healthcare facilities) are leading by example to increase the availability and promotion of healthy food and drinks to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

How will the minimum standards be used by states and territories; do they replace existing policies and guidelines?

The minimum standards reinforce, complement and in some cases strengthen current healthy food and drink strategies in healthcare facilities Australia-wide. They do not replace existing state and territory healthier food and drink policies or guidelines for healthcare facilities (see table 1 page 2). They represent a first step towards achieving harmonised state and territory government commitments around the availability and promotion of food and drinks in government facilities. The minimum standards will inform future updates to state and territory healthcare facilities policies and guidelines.

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Where do the minimum standards apply?

The minimum standards apply to all outlets in healthcare facilities where food and drinks are available to staff and visitors, for example, cafes, cafeterias, kiosks, coffee carts, vending machines, convenience stores, newsagents, post offices, florists, and pharmacies, along with internal and external catering activities.

Minimum standards do not apply to inpatient menus, or residential and aged care facilities, which are addressed through other policies and guidelines in most states and territories. The standards also do not apply to food and drinks brought from home by staff, patients and visitors for personal consumption.

How can the Australian food industry support these efforts?

The Australian food industry can support these efforts by proactively considering and supplying suitable food and drinks that meet the minimum standards. The minimum standards provide an opportunity for all jurisdictions to work towards improving healthy food and drink choices for staff and visitors regardless of whether or not they have a current policy.

Table 1: Current state and territory policies on healthy food and drinks in health care facilities

State/ Territory	Policy name	Policy link
ACT	ACT Health Healthy Food and Drink Choices Policy	https://www.health.act.gov.au/about-our-health-systempopulation-healthhealth-promotion-programs/healthy-food-and-drink-choices
NSW	Healthy Food and Drink in NSW Health Facilities for Staff and Visitors Framework	https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/heal/Pages/healthy-food-framework.aspx
NT	Policy: Healthy food and drink options for staff, volunteers and visitors, in NT Health facilities	https://digitallibrary.health.nt.gov.au/prodjspu/bitstream/10137/904/3/Healthy%20Food%20and%20Drink%20Options%20for%20Staff%2C%20Volunteers%20and%20Visitors%20in%20NT%20Health%20Facilities%20Policy.pdf
Qld	A Better Choice healthy food and drink supply strategy for Queensland Health facilities (currently under review)	https://www.health.qld.gov.au/public-health/topics/healthy-lifestyles/workplaces/choice
SA	Healthy food and drink choices for staff and visitors in SA health facilities	www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/HealthFoodandDrinkPolicy
Tas	No current policy	
Vic	Healthy choices: policy guidelines for hospitals and health services	https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/quality-safety-service/healthy-choices
WA	Healthy Options WA: Food and Nutrition Policy for WA Health Services and Facilities	https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/About-the-Healthy-Options-WA-Policy

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What benefits are expected?

This is part of a strong collective effort to improve children's diets and prevent childhood obesity, and joins initiatives in schools and children's sport and recreation settings. It is expected that these standards will increase the availability, choice, and promotion of healthy food and drinks for staff and visitors in public healthcare settings across Australia. This initiative is also expected to encourage food industry innovation and product reformulation to increase the supply of healthy food and drinks to support these efforts across multiple settings and jurisdictions.

What are the minimum standards based on?

The *Australian Dietary Guidelines* and the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating* (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013) provide evidence-based advice on a healthy dietary pattern, including the types and amounts of foods recommended for good health. These are used to underpin the minimum standards, which also reflect the current environment and expectations of staff and visitors.

How are foods and drinks categorised?

The approach to categorising food and drinks is based on shifting food and drinks supply to more closely align with the *Australian Dietary Guidelines*. The minimum standards also align with another COAG Health Council endorsed initiative which identifies food and drinks not recommended for promotion to children in government owned or leased media settings: the [National interim guide to reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food and drink promotion](#), for voluntary use by state and territory governments.

Do the minimum standards allow all types of food and drinks to be sold?

The minimum standards establish an agreement by all states and territories to not support the sale of sugar-sweetened drinks. A range of healthy drinks such as plain water (tap and bottled), 99% fruit and/or vegetable juices, plain milk, and hot drinks (without additional cream, syrups or confectionery) will still be for sale. Reduced-fat, plain milks are the preferred option but flavoured milk may be included within the range of healthy drinks, as it contains valuable nutrients such as protein and calcium.

These standards aim to increase the availability and promotion of healthy food and drinks to at least 75% of the products available for sale. Less healthy options will still be available but will make up no more than 25% of the products available for sale. These standards also provide guidance on healthy food preparation and appropriate serving sizes.

Why are sugar-sweetened drinks not recommended for sale?

Sugar-sweetened drinks have low nutritional value. They are often consumed in large amounts and provide little sense of fullness, leading to overconsumption, increased energy intake and consequently increased risk of unhealthy weight gain and chronic disease¹. There is also moderate evidence supporting the relationship between increased consumption of sugars and the development of dental caries².

¹ World Health Organization. 2016. 'Reducing consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages to reduce the risk of childhood overweight and obesity'. Available at: [World Health Organisation e-Library](#) (accessed 6 February 2019).

² World Health Organization, 2015. 'Guideline: Sugars intake for adults and children'. Available at: [World Health Organisation - Guideline: Sugars intake for adults and children](#)

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Sugar-sweetened drinks are defined as drinks with low nutritional value to which sugars are added during processing. This includes carbonated soft drinks, flavoured mineral waters, iced teas, cordials, energy and sports drinks, fruit and vegetable drinks with added sugar. Note: Added sugar includes sucrose, fructose, glucose, honey, fruit juice concentrate, fruit sugar syrup and deionised fruit juice.

Flavoured milk drinks are not included as sugar-sweetened drinks because they contain valuable nutrients such as protein and calcium. Note: Milk drinks are drinks where the predominant ingredient is dairy milk or a calcium-fortified dairy-milk-alternative, such as soy/almond/rice milk.

Additionally, 99% fruit and vegetable juices are not included as sugar-sweetened drinks because when consumed in smaller serving sizes they contain some nutritional value.

Why are diet drinks limited in the minimum standards?

Diet drinks are able to be sold but will make up no more than 25% of the drinks offered, as they provide little nutritional value. Water is the healthiest drink and is recommended to be the main drink offered.

The *Australian Dietary Guidelines* state that drinks that are artificially sweetened can provide a useful alternative to those high in added sugars. A wide variety of nutritious, healthier drink options can be offered, including plain tap and sparkling water, 99% fruit and vegetable juices, and plain and flavoured milks.

How will healthy foods and drinks be promoted?

The minimum standards have been designed to make the healthy choice the easy choice in public sector healthcare settings. To do this, healthy food and drinks will be promoted and displayed in prominent places in a food outlet i.e. at the point of sale and counter tops, and at eye level in fridges, shelves and cabinets. Healthy options will also be promoted in meal deals and priced preferentially to less healthy alternatives.

Unhealthy meals, snacks and drinks will not be positioned in places which make these products an easier choice, i.e. they will not be 'front and centre'.