

Creating a Supportive Workplace Food Environment

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Introduction

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is committed to creating and promoting supportive food environments that encourage staff, students, board members, volunteers, clients, and community members to make healthy and sustainable food and beverage choices. As a publicly funded institution, SMDHU has a responsibility to ensure food and eating related policies and practices align with Health Canada’s Dietary Guidelines to reduce the risk of diet-related chronic disease, and to promote food safety and environmental sustainability.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to inform SMDHU Board of Health members, employees, students, and volunteers of their obligations to promote a supportive workplace food environment. A supportive workplace food environment exists when a workplace goes beyond educating employees and uses a comprehensive approach that ensures healthy and sustainable foods are the most accessible food options. SMDHU acts as a role model in promoting healthy sustainable eating to reduce the risk of diet-related chronic diseases, and environmental impacts, including climate change, and is committed to providing an environment that supports health.

This policy will ensure Canada’s Dietary Guidelines are applied in creating and promoting a supportive workplace food environment and will provide direction for food and beverages that are promoted, purchased and/or provided. The application of the policy will apply to all SMDHU-sponsored activities, programs, events, meetings, and functions.

Community partners who lead programs where SMDHU provides support, but no direct funding, are highly encouraged to follow the principles in this policy. Staff may use this policy to encourage partners to consider supportive food environments for non-SMDHU activities, programs, events, meetings and functions.

Legislative Authority

N/A

Policy Definitions and Interpretation

Food environment are the aspects of the social and physical environment that affect the types of food available, the accessibility of food and the nutrition information that people are exposed to. All these aspects of the food environment can influence food choices.

Highly processed foods are processed or prepared foods and beverages that contribute to excess sodium, free sugars, or saturated fat such as processed meat, deep-fried foods,

sugary breakfast cereals, biscuits and cake, confectioneries, sugary drinks, and many ready-to-heat packaged dishes.

Local foods are foods produced in the province or territory in which it is sold, or food sold across provincial borders within 50 km of the originating province or territory.

Protein foods include legumes, nuts, seeds, tofu, fortified soy beverage, fish, shellfish, eggs, poultry, lean red meat including wild game, lower fat unsweetened milk or fortified soy beverage, lower fat unsweetened yogurts, lower fat kefir, and lower fat cheeses.

Staff: The term “staff” will be used in this policy and in Appendix A to refer inclusively to SMDHU Board of Health members, employees, students, and volunteers.

Sugary drinks are beverages that can contribute to excess free sugars. These include soft drinks, fruit-flavoured drinks, 100% fruit juice, flavoured waters with added sugars, sport and energy drinks, and other sweetened hot or cold beverages, such as iced tea, cold coffee beverages, sweetened milks, and sweetened plant-based beverages.

Sustainable foods are foods with low environmental impact which contribute to food and nutritional security and to a healthy life for present and future generations.

Whole grain foods contain all three parts of the kernel. They include whole grain bread, oats, brown or wild rice, whole wheat pizza crust, couscous, flaxseed, kamut, amaranth, millet, quinoa, sorghum, spelt, buckwheat, corn, and cornmeal. On an ingredient list, whole grains can be written as: whole grain, whole wheat, cracked wheat, wheat berries, whole grain rye, barley, wild or brown rice, bulgur, whole oats, rolled oats, whole grain.

Policy

This policy applies to all SMDHU-sponsored and co-sponsored activities, programs, events, meetings, and functions that the health unit hosts, funds directly or funds by means of a flow-through function. This includes food and beverages selected for incentives, fundraising items, or events, as well as those associated with sponsorship agreements or when donations are sought. SMDHU staff will follow the food and beverage principles within this policy. Community partners who receive funding from SMDHU or for whom SMDHU is the flow through for administering funding are expected to follow the principles of this policy.

Food and Beverage Principles

Principle 1: Support healthy eating habits and food environments

- Consider the need to offer food and/or beverages at the program, event, meeting, or function being planned. When the program, event, meeting, or function is for a short period of time (less than 2 hours), and does not fall over a traditional mealtime, providing a snack or beverage may not be necessary. Participants could be encouraged to bring their own beverage or snack if they so choose.
- When providing a meal, ensure a positive eating environment that is clean, and comfortable so people can enjoy their food mindfully while eating in the company of others. Considerations include:
 - Minimizing distractions during mealtime (e.g., consider appropriateness and need for showing a video, conducting a webinar or meeting, scheduling activities that require participation, etc.).

- Offering tables and chairs for people to sit and enjoy their meal.
- Providing enough time for people to eat; 30 minutes for a meal and 15 minutes for a snack is recommended.
- Consider cultural needs (e.g., the significance of providing, or not providing food and drink at gatherings, cultural preferences), and the needs and expectations of participants (e.g., food security, health conditions).
- Determine special dietary needs due to food allergies, intolerances, dietary restrictions, or cultural/religious reasons. Ensure the menu provides adequate choices for those with special dietary needs. Respect nut-free facilities.
- Consider the need to inform participants ahead of time about whether you are serving food and/or beverages. This will help them plan for their own needs.
- Staff are free to bring food and beverages of their choice for their own consumption. To create a supportive nutrition environment, staff are asked not to leave highly processed food and sugary drinks in lunchrooms and other common areas for the purpose of open sharing with other staff, or for fundraising purposes.

Principle 2: Offer healthy sustainable food and beverage choices

If staff determine that food and/or beverages will be provided, select foods that align with [Canada's Food Guide](#) as described below:

- Select options that incorporate the key nutrition elements outlined in Canada's Food Guide. Aim to provide meals and snacks that include a variety of vegetables and fruit, whole grain foods, and protein foods as well as a variety of beverages
- Offer meals using the [Eat Well Plate](#). Vegetables and fruits should make up half the meal/plate. Choose whole grain foods and include protein foods. Offer plant-based protein choices such as beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, and tofu more often.
- Offer whole foods when possible, meaning foods that are less processed and are closest to their natural form.
- Use the food labels to make healthy food selections.
- Aim to include local foods from inspected premises and seasonal options wherever possible.
- Offer safe water at every meal and snack.

Principle 3: Integrate environmental sustainability

Staff are encouraged to follow environmentally sustainable practices described below:

- Determine the number of people attending the event and plan accordingly, to reduce food waste.
- Choose plant-based foods more often, including plant-based proteins to reduce environmental impact.
- Choose Ontario grown products when possible and when in season. Visit [Foodland Ontario](#) to determine which products are in season.
- Use re-useable dishware and utensils instead of disposables when available.

- If reusable dishware and utensils are not available, consider using compostable dishware and utensils.
- Choose products that minimize plastic packaging and bring re-usable bags for produce and groceries when shopping to reduce plastic waste.
- Use bulk condiments, rather than individually packaged items (e.g., spreads, coffee creamers) to avoid waste from garbage. Condiments containers must have self-closing lids and separate dispensing utensils if applicable.
- Dispose of all waste items appropriately (i.e., green bin, recycling, or garbage).
- Encourage people to bring their own re-useable food storage containers to pack leftovers for future consumption. If food is taken, practice safe food handling in alignment with the [Food Handler Certification Training](#).
- Ask people to bring their own re-usable dishware (e.g., reusable water bottles, coffee mugs) where appropriate.

Principle 4: Practice food safety and infection control

Staff are required to follow the food safety and infection control practices described below:

- Follow safe food handling practices as described in [Food Safety and You](#). For additional instruction please see [SMDHU special events guidelines](#). Obtain food and beverages from inspected farms, kitchens, stores, caterers, and restaurants in accordance with Inspection Connection.ca
- Use proper [hand hygiene](#) before and after touching or preparing food and/or serving utensils.
- Follow SMDHU health and safety policies including Infection Prevention and Control: Routine Practices and Additional Precautions, and Cleaning and Disinfection of Non-Critical Multi-Use Device as applicable.
- Always use serving utensils.
- Clean and sanitize all common and eating surfaces before and after food preparation and consumption. The most readily available sanitizer is chlorine (household bleach at 5.25%).
- Use the [three-sink dishwashing method](#) when reusable dishes are used. The two-sink dishwashing method can be used when washing or using utensils. When sinks are not available, use a bin instead. Domestic dishwashers that are NSF/ANSI certified can be used. If a non-NSF certified machine is used, utensils and dishes should be sanitized in the sink or bins available.
- Keep cold foods cold (4°C/ 40°F or lower), and hot foods hot (60°C/140°F or higher). Thermometers in each fridge should be working to verify proper temperatures.

Procedures

1. Vice Presidents, Program Managers, and Supervisors will orient staff to this policy and the expectations for staff compliance.

2. Staff will follow the principles of this policy and exercise professional judgement when making decisions about food and beverages to be offered at SMDHU sponsored activities, programs, events, meetings, and functions. This includes ensuring that offered food and beverages are in compliance with the [BFI policy](#).
3. Staff will reference [Appendix A: Healthy and Sustainable Food and Beverage Choices Checklist](#) to assist with healthy food and beverage selection.
4. Staff are encouraged to request assistance from SMDHU Registered Dietitians by contacting them directly or initiating a Request for Service through Health Connection.
5. Staff who represent SMDHU on committees or partnerships in which SMDHU is accountable regarding the funding, will inform partners of the health unit policy and will use the policy in making decisions about offering food or beverages.
6. Staff will be fiscally accountable and find the lowest cost food options as per SMDHU Procurement Policy F10107 that follow the principles described in this policy and Appendix A.
7. SMDHU staff participating in activities that involve a potential sponsorship or when seeking donations for food or beverages will follow this policy and refer to the SMDHU Corporate Sponsorship Policy F10108 for further direction.
8. Staff may also use this policy to encourage partners to consider healthy eating environments for non-SMDHU activities, programs, events, meetings and functions.

Background

In Canada, dietary risks are one of the three leading risk factors for disease burden, as measured by death and disability combined. Chronic diseases impacted by diet (e.g., heart disease, stroke, colorectal cancer, diabetes, and breast cancer) are among the leading causes of premature death in Canada. There is a significant prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases in Simcoe Muskoka which are reflected in the burden of mortality, morbidity, hospitalization, and health care usage in our communities. By creating healthy sustainable food environments that support staff and clients with optimizing their nutritional health, SMDHU acts as a role model for other organizations.

Healthy and sustainable foods are good for people and the planet, in turn providing additional population health benefits. Beyond promoting nutritious food options, sustainable food systems reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support climate mitigation as well as other environmental health benefits. Choosing healthy sustainable food is a powerful driver of change and encourages sustainable food systems that ensure healthy food for all. This policy helps make advances with mainstreaming climate-health considerations and moving climate action into SMDHU operations.

The food environment influences our food and beverage choices. Health Canada's Dietary Guidelines make an important contribution to nutritional and planetary health. Creating a supportive healthy sustainable food environment within SMDHU increases the positive influence that dietary guidelines have on employees and ensures SMDHU leads by example within our community, furthering the reach of health promotion messages related to healthy food environments and sustainable food systems.

Appendices

[Appendix A: Healthy and Sustainable Food and Beverages Checklist](#)

Related Forms

N/A

Related Policies

F10107 Procurement

F10108 Corporate Sponsorship

Final Approval Signature: _____

Review/Revision History:

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