

Practical ways community organisations can provide healthy food

This information sheet is designed to provide ideas to community organisations on how to provide healthy food and drinks. Community organisations often work with people on low incomes. Research shows that people on low incomes generally eat less healthy diets and suffer more diet-related diseases than the rest of the Australian population.¹ Even if food is only a small part of what your service does, it can contribute to the health and wellbeing of staff and clients.

Ways to provide healthy food and drinks

- Include healthy choices at staff meetings.
- Include healthy choices when catering for community groups and events.
- If your service seeks food donations, ask for donations of healthy food.
- Write and display a food policy.
- Include healthy choices in food parcels and free meals.

Catering

Food choices available at functions and events should aim for the following:

- Predominantly plant-based foods such as fruit, vegetables, wholegrain breads and cereals.
- Moderate amounts of lean meat, skinless chicken, fish and reduced-fat dairy products* (e.g. reduced-fat milk, cheeses and yoghurt).
- Use polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats (e.g. olive oil and margarine) in the preparation of foods.
- Preference for foods that are either fresh, steamed, stir-fried, lightly grilled, oven baked or poached. Fried foods and heavily char-grilled foods should be kept to a minimum.²

Detailed information on healthy catering can be found in the *Healthy and Sustainable Food Choices* document (pages 27- 34) at the Sustainable Blue Mountains website, www.sustainablebluemountains.net.au/ (click on “resources” and then “publications”).

Free Meals

Aim to provide meals based on the Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults (go to www.nhmrc.gov.au/ for more information).

Meals should:

- Include bread and/ or cereal foods (high fibre varieties will be offered when available).
- Include vegetables (preferably at least 2 different types).
- Include fruit or a fruit- based dessert.
- Include lean meat, fish or poultry or meat alternatives.
- Include dairy products (reduced fat varieties* will be offered when available).
- Limit foods high in fat (particularly saturated fat), sugar and salt.
- Include water to drink.

Tips on food label reading

- If comparing food products, always use the per 100g column, rather than the per serve column, as serve size varies.
- Look for products with less than 10grams of total fat per 100grams/ 100ml's.
- Look for products higher in fibre and lower in salt and sugar.

Sample Food Policy

(Organisation name) recognises the importance of healthy food and drinks to the health and wellbeing of staff and clients. We aim to provide healthy food and drinks to staff and clients at meetings, events and in our food parcels.

Meetings/ Events

(Organisation name) will provide both full cream and reduced fat milk for tea and coffee at staff meetings. Fruit will always be available at meetings that are catered.

Monthly barbeque lunch will include lean sausages and hamburger/ vegetarian patties (less than 10g fat per 100grams), button mushrooms, onions, canned beetroot and wholemeal bread.

We will use the *Healthy and Sustainable Food Choices* document, at www.sustainablebluemountains.net.au/, to inform event catering.

Donated Foods

(Organisation name) gladly accepts all donations of food and drink. However, we aim to provide healthy choices to our clients and appreciate donations of:

- fresh fruit and vegetables
- canned fruit (eg peaches, pears, apricots, tropical fruit)
- dried fruit (eg sultanas, apricots)
- canned vegetables (e.g. baked beans, corn, beetroot)
- frozen vegetables (e.g. peas, carrots, beans)
- rice, pasta, noodles, flour, popcorn kernels
- higher fibre bread (e.g. wholemeal and multigrain bread)
- higher fibre breakfast cereals (e.g. porridge, Weetbix, Vitabrits and Fruity Bix)
- canned tuna, eggs

Food Parcels

(Organisation name) will endeavour to provide meals based on the Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults. We aim to provide food parcels that:

- include bread and cereal- based foods (high fibre varieties will be offered when available).
- include vegetables (fresh, canned and/ or frozen)
- include fruit (fresh, canned and/ or dried)
- include lean meat, fish or poultry or meat alternatives.
- include dairy products (reduced fat varieties* will be offered when available).
- limit foods high in fat (particularly saturated fat), sugar and salt.

*Encourage people to use vegetables in food parcels by asking if they know how to prepare the vegetable or including a recipe in the parcel.

*Children under 2 years of age need full cream dairy products.

If your organisation is located in the Blue Mountains or Penrith local government areas and you would like further assistance, contact Karen McCavana, public health nutritionist on (02) 4784 6529 or mccavak@wahs.nsw.gov.au

References

1. NSW Centre for Public Health Nutrition (2003). Food Security Options Paper: A planning framework and menu of options for policy and practice interventions, Better Health Centre, Sydney.
2. NSW Cancer Council. Workplace Healthy Catering: Sample Guidelines. www.cancercouncil.com.au