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Innovative Methods for Healthier Food Options

National leaders, food service providers join Public Health
to promote healthier food choices

LOS ANGELES – The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health convened more than 150 national leaders to discuss innovative and efficient methods to create environments where healthier food options are a choice at the third annual Food Policy Forum, held June 5 at California State University, Los Angeles.

The Food Policy Forum highlighted the ongoing work of Public Health to create healthier food environments through the implementation of nutrition standards and healthy food purchasing practices in county departments. Currently, there are nearly 37 million meals consumed annually at county facilities. Public Health is partnering with county departments and food service providers to offer more fruits and vegetables, lower-calorie beverage options and snacks and entrees that meet dietary guidelines for calories, salt, sugar and fat.

“We have a responsibility to our employees and everyone who visits a county facility to offer healthier meal options to help people make better food choices,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “We will continue to work and encourage environmental changes such as placing fruits and vegetables near cash registers, stocking vending machines with lower calorie snacks and beverages, and offering smaller portion sizes of existing menu items to improve people’s eating behaviors.”

Representatives from government agencies, school districts, food service vendors, hospitals and nonprofit organizations came together to discuss strategies to give LA County residents and visitors more opportunities to choose healthier options when eating away from home. These efforts help leverage the purchasing power of large institutions to promote and increase availability and selection of healthier food options.

“Making healthy choices can be easy, if we continue to work with our partners to provide an environment that supports people in choosing healthy foods,” said Dr. Fielding.

Momentum has been building in LA County to create healthier food environments. The County Board of Supervisors adopted a motion in 2011 requiring Public Health to review and make recommendations aimed at improving nutrition for all new and renewing food service and vending contracts prior to their release as Requests for Proposals. Public Health partnered with the Department of Public Works to increase access to healthier food and beverage options at the Public Works Headquarters cafeteria and vending machines. Other county departments are following their lead.



Other Department efforts to promote healthier food choices include:

- Working with 11 school districts in low-income communities to provide trainings and resources to food service administrators to improve school meal preparation to improve nutritional quality, freshness and appeal.
- Working with LA County farmers' market managers to increase the number of markets accepting CalFresh (food stamps) as payment. In addition, Public Health is partnering with the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) to increase awareness among CalFresh participants of new and existing farmers' markets that accept CalFresh.
- Providing public education on nutrition and healthy eating, including reducing sugary drinks, meal portion sizes and sodium intake in foods consumed.

During the past decade, the obesity epidemic has become one of the most significant public health threats. In LA County, the prevalence of adult obesity increased from 16.7 percent in 1999 to 23.6 percent in 2011. Among children, similar trends were observed over this time period. Collectively, these trends highlight the magnitude of the obesity epidemic and the potential adverse effects from excess weight gain, including increased risk for heart disease, stroke, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, arthritis and several forms of cancer.

For more information on nutrition and healthy eating, connect with Public Health's Choose Health LA online, which represents chronic disease and injury prevention public health efforts in LA County. Visit Choose Health LA on Twitter [@ChooseHealthLA](#), on [Facebook](#) and at [ChooseHealthLA.com](#).

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises nearly 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: @LAPublicHealth.

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