Obesity puts you at higher risk for health problems such as heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes and more. An important way to combat obesity is to increase healthy choices, especially at work. As Americans spend longer hours at work, they often choose to eat lunch and take snack breaks with food from vending machines. Adopting healthy vending policies helps employees and visitors have nutritious options that may impact their well-being and weight. In 2011, the Tulsa Health Department created a vending policy that became a model throughout Oklahoma. Now, a partnership called The Healthy Living Coalition is collaborating with Tulsa to work with local municipalities, organizations, and businesses to adopt a healthy vending policy in Oklahoma City.

The Challenge
In Oklahoma, 33 percent of adults are considered obese. High blood pressure affects 37.5 percent of the state’s residents, and 12 percent have been diagnosed with diabetes. Opportunities to change these trends can be found at work. Gallup issued a report in 2014 that said the average employee spends an average of 47 hours a week at their jobs; employers who provide healthy options can positively affect their workers’ eating behaviors and help them lose weight. In turn, this can lower direct costs associated with insurance premiums and workers’ compensation claims. It also helps decrease employee absenteeism and increase productivity.

“Our thoughts are that a culture of wellness is multifaceted and the vending policy is a strong reminder that we support our employees’ good health.”

- Tulsa Health Department
The Solution
By adopting healthy vending, businesses and organizations are supporting their employees’ health by providing a work environment that helps employees take control of their health. The Healthy Living Coalition, led by the Voices for Healthy Kids coalition and the ANCHOR team in Oklahoma, is partnering with the Tulsa Health Department to spread that agency’s model policy and practice into Oklahoma City. The Tulsa Health Department currently stocks 100 percent healthy options in all their vending machines.

The Healthy Living Coalition is working to leverage the Tulsa Health Department as a champion for healthy vending when educating local municipalities, worksites, and organizations on the rationale and benefits of adopting a healthy vending options initiative. Learning from the Tulsa Health Department’s experiences, the coalition is seeking ways to incorporate best practices into the Oklahoma City project plan. Best practices from the Tulsa Health Department include phasing out unhealthy foods in vending machines over time, and working with a local vendor to switch to “Fit Pick” vending machines, which provide visible nutritional profiles of specific foods.

Sustaining Success
The Tulsa Health Department continues to ensure the “Fit Pick” machines are stocked with popular healthy options, and that all the food meets its nutritional standards. The Tulsa Health Department has annual meetings with key staff about vending machine quality improvement, and holds various wellness activities to create awareness and encourage a culture of health. The Tulsa Health Department, for example, recently partnered with the American Heart Association to hold a sodium challenge for employees and post sodium content of vending items to increase awareness.

The Healthy Living Coalition will build on the lessons learned from the Tulsa Health Department and the efforts undertaken within Oklahoma City to adopt a similar approach in implementing healthy vending options within large businesses and other organizations.

Policy, System and Environmental Change
By creating access to healthy food and beverage options during the work day, the Healthy Living Coalition is working to create new social norms that change individual behaviors around food, and in turn impact community health.

Results
The Healthy Living Coalition will focus its work on the local city council. If the Oklahoma City Council adopts a healthy vending initiative on city owned property, it has the potential to affect 2,250 city employees and visitors to Oklahoma City offices, and up to 600,000 employees and visitors who visit city buildings.

Get Involved
You can get involved by joining us at a Healthy Living Coalition meeting. They occur once a month at the Oklahoma City American Heart Association office. For more information, contact Breanna Russell: Breanna.Russell@heart.org. You also can sign up to be a leader and take action on PreventObesity.net.