Increasing healthier options in vending machines found in local government buildings can benefit both employees and the thousands of people who visit government buildings every day. Employers who support healthier food environments are helping to reverse undesirable health trends, such as rising obesity rates prompted in part by poor food choices. The American Heart Association’s Accelerating National Community Health Outcomes through Reinforcing (ANCHOR) Partnerships team supports healthier living in communities throughout the country. In Oklahoma County, the American Heart Association is improving the nutrition profile of vending machine snacks and beverages sold on all county-owned government property. It does so by working closely with a group of vendors once resistant to changing the standard stock in their machines but now open to incorporating healthier options.

The Challenge
Oklahoma ranks as the eighth most obese state in the nation. Obesity puts a person at higher risk for chronic health problems, including heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure. Oklahoma also holds the ninth highest rate for diabetes, another risk factor linked to obesity. One way to address the dietary problems that often lead to obesity is by increasing consumer access to healthier food, particularly at work sites. Improved snack and drink options in vending machines can positively impact employee wellness since many Americans spend an average 47 hours a week at work. In Oklahoma, all vending machines located on county-run property are owned and operated by a group of licensed blind vendors under a long-standing government employment program called the Randolph-Sheppard Act, which provides expanded opportunities to blind vendors for income from vending machines on government property. These vendors have historically resisted incorporating healthier snacks into their machines because of concerns over product demand and profitability.

“I am so thankful to have the American Heart Association trying to help us do the impossible!”

– Licensed blind entrepreneur

Work made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
The Healthy Living Coalition, led by American Heart Association’s Voices for Healthy Kids and the Oklahoma County ANCHOR teams, is working closely with the Licensed Blind Entrepreneurs to help the vendors incorporate healthier options into their snack and drink machines. ANCHOR leaders are educating the vendors about healthy snack items that are both popular and profitable, as well as the health benefits of stocking such sensible options. ANCHOR also has been showing support and answering questions for group members during the organization’s quarterly meetings, and has provided in-depth training and assistance during one-on-one, follow-up sessions.

**Sustaining Success**

The Healthy Living Coalition continues to be a resource to the contractors operating the vending machines by helping them with machine assessments, providing them with marketing collateral about healthier snack options, and offering training assistance when necessary. Coalition members also schedule regular follow-up meetings as the vendors begin the process of incorporating healthier choices in machines located throughout Oklahoma County. The vendors also have sought ANCHOR assistance in a separate but related project: compliance with new federal labeling guidelines that require vending operators to disclose calorie and other nutritional information of all items sold.

The Solution

The Healthy Living Coalition is successfully working with the group of licensed contractors who own and operate vending machines on all Oklahoma County property to meet the call from consumers who are interested in having access to a wider variety of healthy snacks and beverages. After coalition members successfully demonstrated a broad demand for more nutritious vending machine options, they opened the door to an ongoing dialogue with vendors about healthy living strategies and campaigns that have the potential to reach more than 50,600 people who visit or work at county-owned property on a daily basis. The vendors also invited the coalition to make a presentation at their statewide conference. They are now seeking resources and assistance in their current efforts to become compliant with new nutritional labeling guidelines being required by the federal government.

Policy, System and Environmental Change

The ANCHOR campaign is working to change the current food environment in Oklahoma County worksites through improved access to healthier, more wholesome snacks and drinks. A system change is emerging as a result of the cooperative relationship that the American Heart Association has helped foster between the Healthy Living Coalition and the group of contractors that oversee county vending machines. The vendors are more receptive and understanding about the benefits of selling healthier snack options, and that mindset has started to reverberate throughout their organization, including in other counties and states around the country working on similar issues.

Results

The Healthy Living Coalition is successfully working with the group of licensed contractors who own and operate vending machines on all Oklahoma County property to meet the call from consumers who are interested in having access to a wider variety of healthy snacks and beverages. After coalition members successfully demonstrated a broad demand for more nutritious vending machine options, they opened the door to an ongoing dialogue with vendors about healthy living strategies and campaigns that have the potential to reach more than 50,600 people who visit or work at county-owned property on a daily basis. The vendors also invited the coalition to make a presentation at their statewide conference. They are now seeking resources and assistance in their current efforts to become compliant with new nutritional labeling guidelines being required by the federal government.

Get Involved

Learn more about how you can improve the food environment at your work site to promote a culture of health. [Click here](#) for the American Heart Association’s Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit. Or contact Breanna.Russell@heart.org at the Oklahoma City American Heart Association office.