People who are trying to make smart food choices appreciate having healthier options in vending machines, especially where they work. Healthier vending choices can make it easier for employees to feel comfortable about grabbing a snack to tide them over until they have time for a full, nutritious meal. In Oklahoma, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) through the Department of Rehabilitative Services provides the opportunity for legally blind individuals to be trained to own and operate vending machines on state and county properties. The BEP recently redesigned its orientation program for new vendors. Working with the American Heart Association (AHA) through its Accelerating National Community Health Outcomes through Reinforcing (ANCHOR) Partnerships Program, the BEP now includes information about healthier snack options, including ones that meet federal nutrition guidelines. Providing new vendors with a healthy outlook from the start can help promote a culture of wellness for the community in the long run.

The Challenge
Oklahoma has a rapidly growing obesity problem. The state has the eighth highest adult obesity rate in the nation. Currently, about 34 percent of the adults in the state are obese, compared to the 20 percent in 2000, and 10 percent in 1990. Obesity puts a person at higher risk for health problems, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and diabetes. Obesity often stems from poor diets and making unhealthy choices. Providing healthier vending options, particularly in machines located on public property, can be a step in helping people who want to make better food decisions.

“I feel much better now about healthy options. This training really put me at ease and it feels more doable than before.”
— new Business Enterprise Program Vendor

Work made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
The AHA provided key input for the new orientation program designed by the BEP, which trains a certain group of government vendors operating throughout Oklahoma. In February 2017, AHA’s ANCHOR team conducted a three-hour training session to help new vendors include more healthy food and beverage options in their machines and meet nutrition guidelines set by the federal General Services Administration. The AHA shared strategies for successfully incorporating healthier options without affecting sales and provided tips on reading nutrition labels and understanding what requirements are necessary to meet federal guidelines. The AHA training included tools to survey customers to gauge interest level of potential new items. The AHA training also gave the incoming vendors a sample list of snacks that qualify as healthier options and discussed healthy vending policies that have been adopted in other parts of the county.

**The Solution**

Although initially apprehensive to embrace healthy vending options over concerns the new options would not sell as well as traditional snacks, the BEP has since learned more about nutritional guidelines and methods of successful implementation and now works closely with the AHA to impart that knowledge to new state vendors. The AHA has provided the BEP with a well-received training program that can easily be replicated in future classes for new vendors. Addressing the need for healthier options during orientation for new vendors can go a long way in changing the mindset of Oklahomans that vending machines can offer healthier options.

**Sustaining Success**

The BEP intends to host an orientation for new vendors twice a year that will include the AHA program content. The lessons and resources provided by the AHA during February’s training session, the first under BEP’s revamped program, was designed to be easily duplicated in future classes for new vendors. Addressing the need for healthier options during orientation for new vendors can go a long way in changing the mindset of Oklahomans that vending machines can offer healthier options.

**Policy, System and Environmental Change**

The redesigned orientation program represents a systems change within the BEP organization. By inviting ANCHOR to provide training and agreeing to make it apart of future orientation sessions, BEP has set the stage for new vendors to have an open mindset when it comes to offering healthier options in their machines. While no formal policy is in place, BEP staff has recognized a growing movement and consumer demand for stocking healthier food and beverages in state and county properties.

**Results**

Although initially apprehensive to embrace healthy vending options over concerns the new options would not sell as well as traditional snacks, the BEP has since learned more about nutritional guidelines and methods of successful implementation and now works closely with the AHA to impart that knowledge to new state vendors. The AHA has provided the BEP with a well-received training program that can easily be replicated during future orientation sessions. The BEP works with vendors who operate all of the snack machines located on state and county property throughout Oklahoma. This has the potential to reach not only government employees but also the thousands of people who step inside government buildings every day as visitors. BEP contracts with 33 government facilities throughout the state with multiple property sites and locations.

**Get Involved**

Interested in seeing healthier items sold at the snack and beverage machines in your office? Find out who the local vendor is and reach out! Learn about the steps that the vendor can take to contribute to a healthier work environment. To discover other ways to promote a culture of wellness, check out the AHA’s Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit by [clicking here](#).