Fans of the Pawtucket Red Sox, the minor-league baseball team known as the PawSox now have some healthy food and beverage options to enjoy while they take in a game at McCoy Stadium. After working through concerns over the profitability of selling healthier food, the stadium began offering more nutritious options on its concession stand menu and throughout its private suites. All the menu items labeled as healthy meet nutritional guidelines adopted by the American Heart Association and the Rhode Island Department of Health, the two agencies that helped McCoy with the transition. This resulting partnership has helped the PawSox send a positive community message in support of the well-being of their fans.

The Challenge

Food and beverages sold at sports venue concession stands usually consist of items such as sugary drinks and candy. With limited options, it can be difficult for individuals who are trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle to make healthier choices when they attend ballgames. Sixty-three percent of the population in Rhode Island is overweight or obese. McCoy Stadium attracts families in Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Providence because of its affordable admission. The ballpark club regularly gives away tickets to low-income families and organizations that serve economically disadvantaged children. Obesity is a top concern among this demographic because many of these families lack access to healthy food, a contributing factor to weight-related problems. By increasing the number of nutritious offerings at McCoy’s concession stands, the stadium can help serve as an additional source of accessible healthy food and beverage options in the community.

“I go to about 65 games per year, and it’s often been difficult to find healthy food there. Until recently, stadium-goers have had to choose between eating fried, processed and sugary foods. Now there are numerous more healthy options on the menu, and that’s a big relief.”

– Longtime PawSox season ticketholder
The American Heart Association’s Accelerating National Community Health Outcomes through Reinforcing (ANCHOR) Partnerships program works to support healthy living in communities around the country. The Get Healthy Rhode Island initiative partnered with the state’s health department to help McCoy Stadium encourage fans to make healthier choices by adding more nutritious options to its menu. The ballpark added grilled chicken sandwiches on whole grain bread, veggie cups with hummus, garden salads and fruit cups to its regular concession menu. The Rhode Island Department of Health promoted the healthier items through in-stadium media, while the American Heart Association complimented the effort with a “Strike out sugary beverages – score with water!” educational campaign that urged fans to reduce their consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks. Professional ballplayers also got in the act: videos of them playfully sharing nutrition facts aired during breaks in the game.

The Solution
The American Heart Association’s Accelerating National Community Health Outcomes through Reinforcing (ANCHOR) Partnerships program works to support healthy living in communities around the country. The Get Healthy Rhode Island initiative partnered with the state’s health department to help McCoy Stadium encourage fans to make healthier choices by adding more nutritious options to its menu. The ballpark added grilled chicken sandwiches on whole grain bread, veggie cups with hummus, garden salads and fruit cups to its regular concession menu. The Rhode Island Department of Health promoted the healthier items through in-stadium media, while the American Heart Association complimented the effort with a “Strike out sugary beverages – score with water!” educational campaign that urged fans to reduce their consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks. Professional ballplayers also got in the act: videos of them playfully sharing nutrition facts aired during breaks in the game.

Sustaining Success
The Rhode Island Department of Health will continue to work with McCoy Stadium in upcoming baseball seasons to increase the number of healthy foods it offers visitors. The ballpark also has plans to conduct a survey later in the season to get feedback on the new items and suggestions for future seasons. The work has already attracted local attention and additional momentum as the Boys & Girls Club of Pawtucket has agreed to take soda off the menu and add healthy food and beverages to the concession menu for its inner-city baseball league this summer. As an incentive to buyers, the prices of healthy items are lower than unhealthy ones.

Policy, System and Environmental Change
The Rhode Island Department of Health endorses the American Heart Association’s healthy food and beverage guidelines and uses this standard to provide technical assistance to expand the concession stand menus. Healthier items have become a permanent addition to the concession menu at McCoy Stadium in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. These items can easily be identified by a special checkmark next to each one. This checkmark icon indicates the item meets the American Heart Association’s healthy food and beverage guidelines that have also been approved by the Rhode Island Department of Health.

Results
Salads, grilled chicken sandwiches, fruit cups, veggies and other healthy foods are now available for sale at PawSox games, a favorite destination for families of all income levels in and around Pawtucket. The healthier additions will affect the approximately 460,000 people who visit the stadium each year. The concession stand changes are backed by public support for including more healthy options in public places. According to a poll conducted last summer by the American Heart Association, 88 percent of voters in Central Falls and Pawtucket favor local policies that increase the number of healthy food and beverage options made available at concession stands, among other public venues. McCoy Stadium officials will formally evaluate revenues at the end of the season.

Get Involved
Parents of school-age athletes often spend several nights a week feeding their children dinner from the team concession stands. Make it easier for them, and your entire community, to eat healthier when attending local sporting events: Ask your local sports teams to add healthy food options to their concession menus. Also consider advocating for limited sales of sugary beverages.