

The City of Mississauga: Committed to Healthy Eating in the Recreation Setting

Mississauga, Ontario



The Initiative

In Mississauga, Ontario, a combination of circumstances prompted the City of Mississauga to take a closer look at healthy eating in recreation settings.

The City of Mississauga

The City of Mississauga, Canada's sixth largest municipality, is located on the Traditional Territory and Treaty Lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. It boasts a culture that is diverse and cosmopolitan, as well as lifestyle that supports, arts, culture, and nature. Mississauga, celebrating 50 years in 2024, is a relatively young city that has become a major hub for innovation and economic development.



The Impetus for Change

A combination of factors prompted the City of Mississauga to tackle the issue of healthy eating in their recreation facilities:

- It seemed intuitive that people coming to a facility to be active and pursue other lifestyle-related activities should also have access to healthier food choices.
- Revenue for concessions was declining annually due to higher operational costs, resulting in an annual net loss of approximately \$200,000. Based on this finding, a number of arena concessions were closed.
- Over the past ten years, customer demand has shifted, calling for more nutritious food options and public policy to support healthier communities.
- In October 2010, the Ministry of Education adopted the School Food and Beverage Policy, with the intention of making the healthier option the easier option. The policy established the nutrition standards for food and beverages sold in publicly funded elementary and secondary schools.
- Finally, Type 2 diabetes was (and still is) a major concern for residents of Mississauga. In 2019, Type 2 Diabetes accounted for 90% of all diagnosed cases in Canada and was the fastest growing chronic disease (it had increased 182% from 1996 to 2015).

The Response: Healthy Food and Beverage Policy for Recreation Facilities

Due to the proximity of Recreation facilities to local schools, as well as the increase in Type 2 diabetes rates, and because offering unhealthy, high-fat, high-sugar, nutrient poor and fried foods in recreation facilities provided conflicting messaging to Mississauga residents, particularly children and youth, recreation staff worked closely with the Region of Peel Public Health staff to develop a Healthy Food and Beverage Policy. In March of 2020 the policy was approved by Council with a September implementation date for all vending and concessions within City owned/operated Recreation facilities.

The Policy specified the product mix to be adhered to which was Beverages to Promote (75%), Beverages to Limit (25%) and Beverages to Avoid (0%). Prepackaged and prepared food must fully meet the nutrition criteria (which excludes highly processed prepackaged food, deep fried foods and processed meats).

For more information about the implementation details and the Region of Peel Nutrition Standards, visit the [City of Mississauga Corporate Policy and Procedure](#).

The Response: Healthy Food and Beverage Policy for Recreation Facilities continued

There is a stipulation that the Director of Recreation & Culture, or designate, may make exceptions to the criteria on a case-by-case basis. One such example where an exemption was made was in the summer of 2023 when golfers made the case for the loosening of some of the guidelines. Based on an extensive customer feedback process, some additional items were added to Golf Course concessions. While the menu continues to include healthy options that comply with the nutrition standards, additions were made to include some processed meats and beverages containing some sugar.

To further tackle the issue of rising rates of Type 2 diabetes, Mississauga joined the Cities Changing Diabetes initiative in 2021. Cities Changing Diabetes drives action against type 2 diabetes in more than 40 cities world-wide. The global public-private partnership programme addresses the systemic issues underlying the rise in type 2 diabetes and aims to reduce health inequity. One of the reasons this is significant to the policy is that it provides rationale and support for adhering to the policy.

Success and Challenges

- Though not specifically surveyed about the Healthy Food and Beverage Policy, users and renters of the facilities regularly answer formal surveys about their experiences. No concerns were raised through these surveys. However, staff did receive informal requests for more variety in menu offerings and some city Councilors received questions from residents. City of Mississauga staff and Councilors saw this as an opportunity to educate residents on the policy.
- According to reports from the vending machine vendors, there has been no significant drop in vending revenues since the implementation of the policy. Continued monitoring and informal surveying will continue to be done to determine if any changes need to be made to the program while exemptions may still be made in special circumstances by the Director of Recreation and Culture (i.e. special events, where food is donated, etc.).



Lessons Learned

A number of lessons learned will guide the next steps of this initiative:

- City Council support, the development of a policy, and an affiliation with the Cities Changing Diabetes project all provided the needed support to enact and continue this initiative.
- An informal national scan/benchmarking exercise conducted by City of Mississauga staff found that the city's policy was quite advanced. Being flexible when situations warrant and making some changes in response to resident feedback was a key change to the program.
- The support of the public health department was a key aspect of developing the policy.
- Opportunities may exist for future policy development including a staged implementation and Provincial or Federal mandates to garner buy-in from decision-makers and residents.

For more information

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