Vending Machine Intervention Increases Healthy Options

Summary

In an effort to improve the nutrition environment in Woodbury County, Siouxland District Health Department completed 119 individual vending machine assessments at nine different businesses over the course of three years. They provided technical assistance to the businesses and the vending companies on ways to increase the percent of healthier options in those machines. As a result the percent of healthy options in the vending machines increased nearly 21%, 66% of the businesses received a site award, and two businesses developed a policy.

Challenge

Iowa has the 13th highest adult obesity rate in the nation, according to The State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America released August 2017. Iowa’s adult obesity rate is currently 32% and Woodbury County, Iowa is higher than the state average sitting at 34%. The trend in obesity rates continues to rise and one factor contributing to the rise in obesity rates is that more and more people are eating food outside the home. These individuals are then forced to make a choice between a healthier food and beverage and ones that are not as healthy. Take vending machines for instance, often times adults and children will stop for a quick bite to eat or grab a snack from a vending machine at work or even at a medical appointment. If there are no healthy vending options, the consumer is forced to choose an unhealthy option that is often high in calories, fat, and sodium.

"I hope that businesses continue to complete assessments. Having healthy food options available in the workplace has a positive affect on many factors, including employee wellness."

- Kevin Grieme, Siouxland District Health, Health Director

Solution

In order for individuals who are standing in front of a vending machine to make a healthier choice, the machine has to have healthier options. Siouxland District Health Department reached out to businesses, health care organizations, and public locations and provided free vending machine assessments at nine locations. They then worked with local vending companies who serviced those sites to increase the percent of healthier options in the machines. They also provided color coded product pushers to the vending companies, encouraged businesses to implement healthy vending policies, worked with them to increase healthier options, and then completed follow-up assessments at all locations.

Success Stories

http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/
Results
Siouxland District Health Department completed 119 vending machine assessments on 56 different vending machines at nine health care facilities, worksites, and community locations. Only 7 machines received an award at the initial assessment compared to 42 after the intervention. The initial assessments showed the total percent of healthier options at each site ranged from 6% to 40% with an average of 25%. That is 1 in 4 products being a healthy option before the intervention. After the intervention, nearly 1 out of every 2 products available were a healthier option and the total percent of healthier options at each site ranged from 26% to 78%. The average improvement across all sites was 21% and ranged from 7% to 38%. Six out of the nine sites received a site award and two developed a policy regarding healthy onsite vending.

Sustaining Success
As you know the vending environment is constantly changing as vending machines are stocked and as new products are developed and introduced to the market. Siouxland District Health Department will continue to provide technical assistance and vending machine reassessments to sites previously assessed in an effort to sustain the environmental changes completed during this intervention. They will also continue to provide free vending machine assessments and technical assistance to any public or private entity that is interested in improving their nutrition environment whether it be for vending machines or concession stands.

Your Involvement Is Key
You can change the nutrition environment at your worksite or throughout your community by working with public or private entities and your vending companies. Simply take the NEMS-V training on-line at www.nems-v.com, complete assessments at your worksite or contact local businesses and complete assessments throughout your community. Then educate your vending companies on NEMS-V and help them determine what healthier vending products they could sell in their machines.

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