

A Local Policy Process for Promoting Healthy Food Access with the The King County Board of Health



Sara Woolcock, RDN; MPH Candidate, University of Washington Nutritional Sciences Program

CONTEXT

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS CAN PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN REDUCING HEALTH DISPARITIES THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES THAT IMPROVE EQUITABLE HEALTHY FOOD AND BEVERAGE ACCESS. The King County Board of Health is comprised of county elected officials and health professionals that set county-wide health policy and regulations. On June 20th, the Healthy Eating, Active Living Unit at Public Health - Seattle & King County (PHSKC) briefed the board on the state of food access in King County. At that meeting the Board voted to form a healthy eating committee comprised of both Board and community members to develop recommendations of policy options for the Board to adopt in order to address diet-related health disparities across the county.

PURPOSE

My project with the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) unit at Public Health – Seattle & King County was to support their eminent collaboration with the King County Board of Health in the formation of a Healthy Eating Committee.

The Goals of the project were:

- > Research the background and interests of the current Board of Health members
- > Develop understanding of the Board of Health's functions & background for HEAL and the committee
- > Assist in developing a process for selecting committee members from the community
- > Explore the feasibility of policy options for the committee to recommend to the Board

METHODS

- > **Created a briefing for the committee** about the Board's jurisdiction, past policy actions the Board has taken to promote healthy eating, and the impacts of these actions.
- > **Assisted in creating an application form to recruit community members** to join the committee, focusing on limiting barriers for individuals to apply.
- > **Researched potential policy options that other cities have passed to promote healthy food access** and that the committee could consider recommending to the Board. The costs and resources needed for each were considered, and the list of options was sent to the County Attorney's Office for a legal review.



Figure 1. The four categories of actions the Board of Health can take to promote healthy food access in King County in order of the highest amount of direct impacts each action generates from left to right.

MAIN RESULTS

- > **The King County Board of Health has broad authority to pass policies and regulations relating to "protecting and promoting the health"** of county residents as long as the regulations are not preempted by state-level policy.
- > **In the past, the Board has passed mainly resolutions relating to healthy eating, but they have also passed innovative regulations**, including artificial trans fat bans and menu labeling regulations, that have lent momentum to similar nationwide efforts.

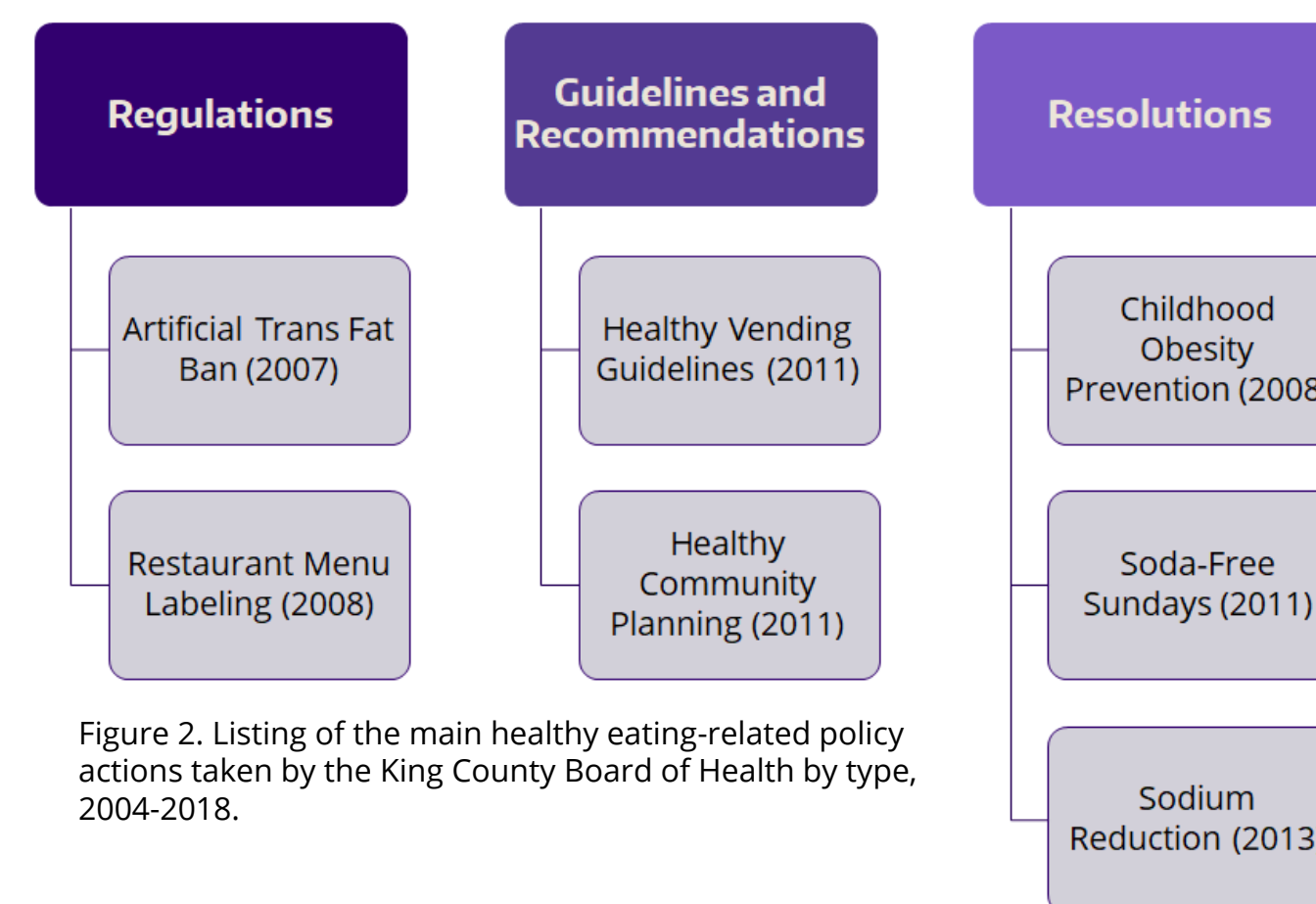


Figure 2. Listing of the main healthy eating-related policy actions taken by the King County Board of Health by type, 2004-2018.

LESSONS LEARNED

When engaging community members in the policy making process, it's important to consider:

- > **How to define a "community"**. For our purposes, we defined community as a grouping of people "sharing common characteristics, interests, or purpose," emphasizing the role of individuals with lived experience over expertise.
- > **How to fairly engage community members giving their time and resources to the process**. Consider compensation, meeting times, locations, and how recommendations will be implemented by the governing body.

HEALTHY EATING POLICY ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE KING COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH BY YEAR, 2004-2018



Scan here for more resources about implementing local policy options for healthy food access and poster references.



LOCAL POLICY OPTIONS

Policy/Action	Description	Examples
Comprehensive Planning	Plans used to drive future budget and policy agendas	- Healthy Communities Planning - Ex: Healthy Des Moines Element
Ordinance	Law or regulation of a governing body	- Healthy Kids Meal/Beverage Defaults - Sugary beverage portion sizing, proportional pricing - Clean windows - restrict all advertising in windows of retail spaces for public safety (de facto rids spaces of food ads) - Warning labels on sugary drinks, processed foods
Zoning	Dividing county land into zones for different uses	- Restrict new fast food zoning - Healthy retail zoning around schools, parks, youth-spaces
Licensing/Fees	Government granting permission to conduct a particular business or act	- Restaurant kids meal standards - Incentivize mobile food permits with prime locations that meet nutrition guidelines - Farmers markets fees
Economic Incentives	Taxes, tax credits	- Sugary Beverage Taxes
Initiatives	Programs and funding support	- Healthy Food Retail - Water Access - Healthy Restaurant Recognitions
Government Procurement	Require or publish nutrition standards for all county food purchases	- Can apply to just county buildings or all publicly run institutions - Ex: Good Food Purchasing Program

NEXT STEPS

- > **The healthy eating committee will have its first meeting in the fall**, receive briefings on the Board of Health and the issues of food justice that the committee will work to address, and set the shared goals and values of the committee for decision making.
- > **The committee will continue to meet monthly**, and develop policy recommendations for the Board to adopt.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No external funding was used for this practicum project. Thank you to the Healthy Eating, Active Living unit of Public Health – Seattle and King County.

Special thanks to Kate Ortiz, MPH, RD for her mentorship and guidance during my practicum experience. Additional thanks to Elizabeth Kimball, Mariel Torres-Mehdipour and Mary Snodgrass for their additional assistance and guidance with my project.

