

# He Kupu mō ngā Kitenga Rangahau Research Findings Brief

HEALTHIER  
LIVES

He Oranga Hauora

National  
**SCIENCE**  
Challenges



## HYPE – HealthY Policy Evaluation

### Key points

- Aotearoa New Zealand has some of the highest rates of diet-related diseases in the world.
- Numerous studies have shown that New Zealand food environments are largely unhealthy.
- The HYPE study evaluated the voluntary National Healthy Food and Drink Policy (the Policy), one of the few New Zealand policies aimed at improving the food environment.
- Adoption of the Policy was low and, where implemented, it did not significantly improve the availability of healthy food and drinks in New Zealand hospitals and health sector organisations.
- Some positive changes were observed over time, but no organisation fully met the nutritional guidance in the Policy. It is therefore recommended that a consistent, mandatory healthy food and drink policy be implemented.
- Staff, visitors, and food providers generally agreed that having a healthy food policy is important for New Zealand hospitals, and tools and resources are needed to support its implementation.



### PROJECT TIMELINE

January 2020 – December 2023

### LEAD RESEARCHER

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University of Auckland

### CO-DESIGN PARTNERS

Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora  
Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora  
National Food and Drink  
Environments Network



We evaluated the adoption, implementation and impact of the National Healthy Food and Drink Policy.



We found that adoption of the voluntary Policy was low, there was insufficient support for its implementation, and the Policy was not effective.



We are working with Te Whatu Ora to optimise the Policy, using the findings of the evaluation and tools developed by the HYPE team.



## What did we do?

**The National Healthy Food and Drink Policy\* was introduced as a voluntary policy for District Health Boards (DHBs) and central government agencies in 2016.**

In 2021/2022 the HYPE team evaluated where and how the Policy had been adopted and implemented, what its impact had been, and what tools and resources could support its implementation in Aotearoa New Zealand.

\*The Policy was developed by the National Food and Drink Environments Network in partnership with the Ministry of Health.

## What did we find?

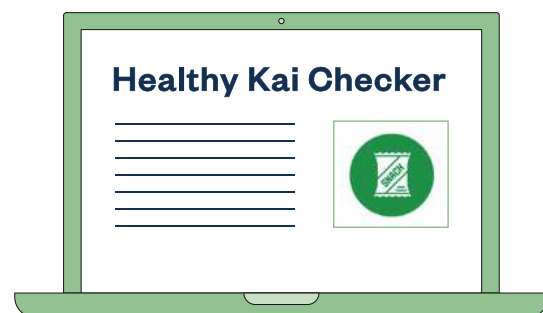
- Only eight of 20 DHBs and one central government agency had adopted the Policy in full, with some still working towards adoption.
- Comprehensive on-site audits of food and drink availability showed that no organisation met Policy guidance that healthy foods and drinks should be the predominant options available.
- Organisations that adopted the Policy had healthier foods and drinks on average, but the proportion of unhealthy items available for sale remained high.
- The Policy impacted Māori and Pacific staff to a greater extent than non-Māori/non-Pacific staff because they reported buying foods and drinks on-site more often.
- Food providers believed the Policy was not prioritised due to a lack of national leadership and mandate, and because no supportive tools and resources were available.

The HYPE study results provided direct evidence of the ineffectiveness of the unsupported, voluntary Policy as a health promotion tool.

## What did we produce?

**The HYPE team produced resources to enhance the future implementation and impact of the Policy. These include:**

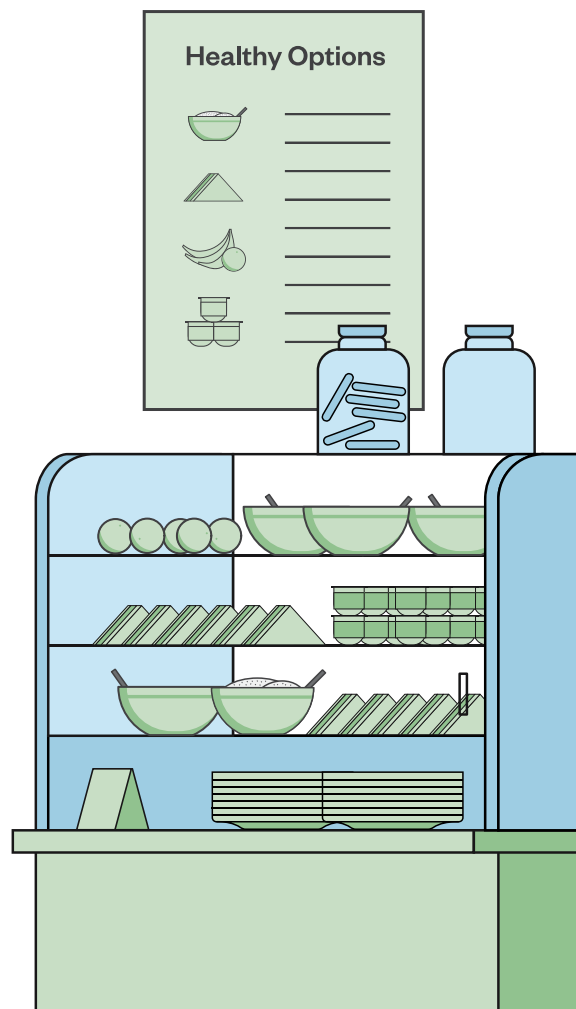
- a digital tool that organisations can use to audit the food and drinks available on-site and highlight areas where more implementation support is needed;
- a web-based database called Healthy Kai Checker to help food providers identify healthy foods and drinks by checking how items are classified according to the Policy's criteria.



## Why does it matter?

- INFORMAS\* has found that New Zealand's food environments are largely unhealthy, and relevant policy implementation is low.
- New Zealand has fewer healthy food environment policies than countries such as Australia, the UK, Canada and the US, and most New Zealand initiatives are voluntary.
- High rates of diet-related diseases in Aotearoa underscore the need for effective policies to guide healthy food environments rather than just relying on individuals to make healthier choices.
- The findings of this comprehensive evaluation offer insights to strengthen healthy food and drink policies in the health sector.
- Most of the New Zealand population has some engagement with the health sector – implementing a healthy food policy demonstrates commitment to the wellbeing of staff and visitors, and models healthy eating to the wider community.
- The outcomes of this policy evaluation can be applied in other New Zealand settings such as schools and workplaces.

\*The International Network for Food and Obesity/NCDs Research, Monitoring and Action Support.



**“Our Team has been tasked with coming up with a Te Whatu Ora wide Healthy Food and Drink Policy. We found the HYPE study results incredibly helpful with the design of the new policy, particularly the HYPE recommendations which were evidence based and pragmatic.”**

### **Dr Rob Beaglehole**

National Public Health Innovation and Advancement Team, Te Whatu Ora



“We have had a mandatory policy in place at Te Toka Tumai for years, however, have never had resourcing to evaluate it... thank you to the HYPE team, the data you have collected means we can make evidence-based decisions on policy making”.

### **Amanda Buhaets**

Advanced Liaison Dietitian, Te Toka Tumai, Auckland

“I totally understand and applaud this policy. In its essence it is a wonderful concept and as a hospital we should be encouraging healthy eating habits. I love the salads we make, and the great hot options that we provide that are healthy and lovely to eat. But as a manager trying to stick to budget and get the revenue in and keep the customers happy, it's hard.”

### **Food provider**

“[It's] all about bringing people on a journey to get buy in, so there should be some more info around to inform them why there is no deep-fried food, big portions etc. Make it fun and light-hearted”.

“All public sector organisations should actively design healthy and sustainable food environments to ease the burden on whānau for accessing great and nourishing food.”

“The policy is important, and I agree there is a role in leading by example, but where it matters is in the approach and affordability of what's offered.”

### **Staff members**

## Next steps

A Te Whatu Ora working group is reviewing and updating the Policy, assisted by the HYPE team. They are engaging with retailers and food providers to:

- gather their opinions on the current version of the Policy;
- assess the current food supply and evaluate products that are available;
- obtain detailed nutrient and cost analyses of the typical foods/drinks supplied to Te Whatu Ora facilities;
- identify sustainability initiatives that could be supported;
- find out what support they need to implement the Policy.

The working group will also compare Policy criteria with similar policies adopted in Australia, and engage with Māori stakeholders to ensure that the updated Policy honours and upholds Te Tiriti.

## What are food environments?

The environment we live in influences what we eat. Our physical, economic and cultural surroundings, as well as the policies governing food, affect our choices. Food environments also include things like the composition, labelling, marketing and affordability of food and drinks.

Evidence-based mandatory policies aimed at making food environments healthier are the most effective strategies for creating equitable population-wide improvements in nutrition.

The Healthy Kai Checker makes it easy to see if the food we're providing complies with the policy. It used to take me so much time.

Perfect! Some healthy options.



## Publications

- **2021 assessment of New Zealand district health boards' institutional healthy food and drink policies: the healthy policy evaluation (HYPE) study.** *The New Zealand Medical Journal* 2022; 135(1560):67-76.
  - **Barriers and facilitators to implementation of healthy food and drink policies in public sector workplaces: a systematic literature review.** *Nutrition Reviews* 2024; 82(4):503-535, doi: 10.1093/nutrit/nuad062
  - **Tools and resources used to support implementation of workplace healthy food and drink policies: A scoping review of grey literature.** *Nutrition & Dietetics* 2023; 80(5):452-462. doi: 10.1111/1747-0080.12844
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## Research team

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**Our vision** is of Aotearoa New Zealand with equitable health outcomes and a substantially reduced burden of non-communicable diseases.

**Tō mātou kitenga** kia noho a Aotearoa New Zealand hei whenua he ōrite ngā putanga hua hauora mō te tangata, kia iti iho hoki ngā pūkauranga o ngā māuiui kāore e taea te tuku ki te tangata kē.

The **Healthier Lives – He Oranga Hauora National Science Challenge** is a national collaborative research programme, investigating innovative approaches to the prevention and treatment of four major non-communicable diseases (NCDs) – cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity.

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