

Public appetite for healthier vending machines

July 16 2015, by Michelle Blowes

Health conscious Australians are hungry for more nutritious options in fast food vending machines according to new research by the University of Sydney and University of Wollongong.

The study, published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, reveals an appetite for healthy food options such as fresh fruit, vegetables, and yoghurt in vending machines in public places like hospitals and universities.

Eighty seven percent of the 240 people surveyed thought the current range of vending machine snacks are 'too unhealthy', with 80 percent willing to pay the same or even extra dollars for healthier alternatives.

The lead researcher and accredited practising dietitian, Professor Vicki Flood from the University of Sydney, said vending machines are part of an unhealthy environment which is contributing to a rise in diabetes and obesity through the availability of energy-dense snacks and sugary drinks.

"We know that around one third of our [daily calorie intake](#) comes from snacking and with the busy lifestyles that we all lead, healthy eating often falls victim to convenience," said Professor Flood.

"However this study shows that many Australians are becoming more aware of their diet and there is an opportunity to use vending machines to promote healthy snacking, particularly in busy environments like train

stations and hospitals."

The study was conducted in a university campus and public hospital in regional Australia, and surveyed the views of over 120 students and 120 hospital employees, patients and visitors.

The researchers also assessed the impact front-of-packet nutritional labelling had on purchase decisions, finding that more people chose the healthier food option when presented with nutritional values before purchase. The same impact was not seen in the drinks category.

A [2012 audit](#) of vending machines in Sydney train stations by Professor Flood and colleagues at the University of Wollongong found few healthy snacks are on offer.

Only three percent of all vending machine slots were allocated to healthier choices like nuts, tuna or portion controlled chips, and these options were generally more expensive.

Following a food preferences survey of 650 students earlier this year, the University of Sydney will be trialing more nutritious options in vending machines from Semester 2, 2015.

Ms Elly Howse from the Health Sydney University initiative said over ninety percent of students showed an interest in healthier food for lower cost.

"We are trialling better [vending machine](#) options in popular library and study spaces, as we know from our students that convenient food options are needed after-hours when campus [food](#) outlets are closed," said Ms Howse.

"This is just one of the many initiatives we are undertaking at the

University of Sydney, in collaboration with the University of Sydney Union, to give students more choice and opportunities to make better decisions for their health and wellbeing."

Professor Flood said there are logistical challenges to improving vending machines but innovative businesses in Queensland and Melbourne have already recognised the market potential.

More information: "Consumer support for healthy food and drink vending machines in public places." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. doi: 10.1111/1753-6405.12386

Provided by University of Sydney

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