

Healthy Food Service Guidelines for Worksites and Institutions: A Literature Review

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Background

Healthy Food Service Guidelines (HFSG) are policies that support healthier food environments by guiding the procurement, provision, and promotion of nutritious options in worksites and institutions.¹

While extensively studied in school settings^{2,3}, their implementation and impact in adult-serving worksites and institutional settings remain less well synthesized.

Methods

This review updates a previous scoping review⁴ with a PubMed search (2022–July 2025) based on the same inclusion criteria:

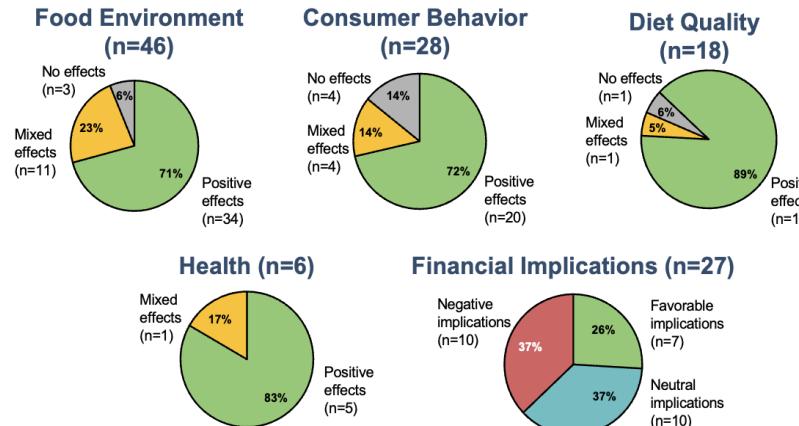
- Original HFSG interventions in non-school worksites and institutions
- At least one of the five outcomes of interest: food environment, consumer behavior, diet quality, health, and financial implications
- Excluded: K–12/ECE, therapeutic diets, or commercial venues

Data were extracted on setting, study design, and outcome direction. Findings were narratively synthesized by outcome area, and study quality was assessed for strengths and limitations.

Results

A total of 78 studies were included (68 from the scoping review⁴ and 10 from the updated search) and categorized by outcome area (Fig 1). Most reported positive effects on the food environment (71%), consumer behavior (72%), and diet quality (89%). Health outcomes were evaluated in six studies, five of which showed improvements. Financial outcomes were more mixed: 26% of studies reported favorable implications, 37% neutral, and 37% negative. Overall, the evidence suggests that HFSG interventions can enhance nutrition environments and dietary behaviors in institutional settings, with emerging support for health benefits and mixed, but often neutral, financial implications.

Figure 1. Summary of Evidence on the Impacts of HFSG by Outcome



Implications

HFSG have strong potential to improve population health by creating healthier institutional food environments and encouraging better dietary habits. Despite variability in financial outcomes, most studies reported either neutral or positive fiscal impacts, suggesting HFSG are feasible with careful planning and implementation. Success depends on clear nutrition standards, robust monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and ongoing support.

Policymakers should consider HFSG a viable tool to promote healthier food environments in institutional settings beyond schools.

Acknowledgments

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Scan the QR code to read the scoping review.



References

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