



KIDS' MEALS IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKIT



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INTRODUCTION

For more than 50 years, CSPI has been an influential force in the fight for a better food system. We are committed to partnering with communities, organizations, and individuals as they explore and enact innovative policies at the local, state, and federal level that advance a just and equitable food environment. CSPI leverages our unique expertise to support passing policies that increase access to nutritious food, support healthy food and beverage choices, and ensure a healthy diet for those that experience the greatest health disparities.

A crucial part of this work is helping to build the capacity of our partners and other community-based organizations around the country. To this end, we have developed several policy toolkits for CSPI's priority issue areas, including the one you have here. These toolkits are living documents designed to support your advocacy, whether you're a seasoned pro looking for the latest research or are brand new to this issue and trying to figure out where to begin. We've structured this toolkit as a roadmap to guide your campaign, with academic research, case studies, model policies, messaging guidance, and other resources you may need. Included throughout are links to additional resources, developed by CSPI and by our partners, for your deeper learning. We also invite you to explore CSPI's [Resource Hub](#) and [Resource Library](#) for more tools that you may find useful.

This toolkit is focused on implementation and enforcement of policies that improve the options offered on kids' menus at restaurants in your community. For more information on policies impacting restaurant kids' meals and how to bring a policy to your community, we encourage you to review the [Restaurant Kids' Meals Toolkit](#).

POLICY BACKGROUND

Healthier foods can be hard to come by at restaurants, especially on the kids' menu. In 2018, 71.9 percent of kids meals at the top 50 restaurant chains in the U.S. failed to meet expert nutrition standards.¹ On days when children eat at restaurants, they typically consume more calories, sugars, sugary drinks, saturated fat, and sodium than days when they do not eat at restaurants.² Since restaurants are a major source of food for American children,^{3,4} it is important that they offer healthy options. That's why communities across the country have taken action and passed policies to improve restaurant kids' meals by requiring restaurants to make healthier beverages and sides the default offerings with kids' meals and/or setting nutrition standards for restaurant kids' menus.⁵

In order for these policies to have their intended effect, it is important that they are fully implemented by restaurants and enforced by the enforcing agency, typically the health department. Some reasons a policy may not be implemented or enforced include the enforcing agency not being fully informed of the policy, limited resources for the enforcing agency to notify restaurants or check for compliance, and restaurants not being made aware of the policy or lacking the knowledge or resources to implement the policy. Some kids' meals policies have not been fully implemented and enforced due to similar reasons.^{6,7} This toolkit will guide you through activities you can engage in, as an advocate, before and after policy passage in order to ensure the policy is implemented and enforced.



IMPLEMENTATION (im-plə-mən-'tā-shən)⁸

The process of making something active or effective

ENFORCEMENT (in-'fōr-smənt)⁹

To carry out effectively

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BEFORE POLICY PASSAGE

You can set the policy up for success by planning for implementation and enforcement throughout the campaign, including before the policy is introduced and passed. This section gives you tips for planning a healthy kids' meals campaign and how you can start thinking about implementation and enforcement before the policy is even introduced.

MEET WITH COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS AND BUILD A COALITION

Before you work to introduce your policy, it is important you reach out to community stakeholders and seek their input.

One stakeholder that is especially important to seek feedback from is the department or agency that will be responsible for enforcing your kids' meal policy, which is typically the health department. People at the health department can provide valuable insight on the department's existing workflows, resources, and capacity, which can help you tailor the bill to make it easier for the department to enforce. In addition, the health department may decide to support your efforts to pass a kids' meal policy, which may help you make your case to lawmakers.

CHARLES COUNTY CASE STUDY

Developed and written by Robin Williams

In Charles County, MD, the local and state chapters of the NAACP worked with the health department to develop a kids' meal policy that served both the community's needs and the department's needs. The case study below describes how that partnership was invaluable to the success of the campaign, and an excerpt of the policy is included to demonstrate how advocates adapted the policy to the community's and health department's needs.

In late September 2022, a group of Charles County, Maryland leaders and officials came together to discuss the need to reduce kids' risk for diet-related health problems, like obesity and type 2 diabetes. Out of the convening, a partnership was formed with the goal of ensuring kids had healthy meal options at home, school, and in restaurants. Dyotha Sweat, President of the Charles County NAACP, organized a coalition of community advocates, teachers, students, parents, minority business owners, and public health organizations. Key coalition members included Charles County Department of Health Director, Dr. Diana Abney; School Superintendent, Dr. Maria Navarro; School Food and Nutrition Services Supervisor, Crystal Richardson; the American Heart Association; and CSPI. Shortly after coming together, the coalition launched its countywide Healthy Restaurant Kids' Meals Campaign.

The coalition's efforts were quickly recognized; on October 2, 2022, Charles County legislators commissioned a proclamation designating October as Children' Health Month. Representatives from the Charles County NAACP, Public Schools System, and the Department of Health accepted the proclamation. Following the proclamation, the coalition hosted its first Healthy Kids Fun Fest. The annual October event is dedicated to promoting healthy choices for children and families and allowed coalition members to engage with community members on the topic of healthy restaurant kids' meals.



The coalition worked with the kids' meals bill sponsor, Commissioner Collins, and his team to develop a policy that would provide a healthy choice for kids and assist restaurants with implementing the policy, while not overly burdening the Department of Health or penalizing restaurants. The Charles County Department of Health coalition members provided important insight that shaped the final bill language.

The policy directs the Department of Health to develop a form to allow restaurants to self-certify that they are in compliance with the policy. The goal of this form was to reduce the burden on Department of Health restaurant inspectors and business owners.

The legislation also requires the Department of Health to conduct educational outreach. The program will provide restaurant owners with the necessary training, written information, and signage (in multiple languages) needed for owners to meet law requirements, with the goal of boosting implementation. The Department of Health will also develop decals that highlight menu items in compliance with the law, which restaurants can include next to healthy meals on their kids' menu.

There were challenges. The Restaurant Association of Maryland successfully influenced the introduction of amendments to limit the impact of the policy. This was where having the Department of Health Director as a coalition lead was especially influential. Testimony from Department of Health Director Abney successfully persuaded the Board of Commissioners to reconsider the amendments. Many of the amendments were ultimately overturned, and Charles County became the third county in the country to pass legislation requiring restaurants to provide healthy kids' meals options on January 9, 2024, with a unanimous vote.

CHARLES COUNTY ENFORCEMENT LANGUAGE

- A. The Charles County Department of Health shall make available a process by which citizens can submit complaints regarding noncompliance with this chapter.
- B. The Charles County Department of Health shall develop a self-certification form which shall document compliance with this chapter. The Department shall disseminate said form to eating and drinking establishments.
- C. Eating and drinking establishments shall submit the self-certification form to the Charles County Department of Health once annually when applying for license renewal.
- D. Any eating and drinking establishment that violates any provision of this chapter shall be guilty of a civil infraction and may be punished as follows:
 - 1. For the first violation, the Charles County Department of Health shall provide information concerning the requirements of this chapter and issue a written warning requiring the eating and drinking establishment to comply with this chapter within 60 calendar days or a time period acceptable to the Department.
 - 2. For the second violation, the Charles County Department of Health shall issue a violation notice requiring submission of a corrective action plan within 30 business days of the receipt of the notice. The time period for corrective action shall not exceed an additional 30 calendar days. A subsequent violation shall be treated as a first offense.
 - 3. All violations other than those disposed of pursuant to subsections D(1) and D(2) may be punished by a civil fine of \$500 while the eating and drinking establishment remains non-compliant.

You should also seek feedback from community members and see what changes they would like to see from a potential kids' meal policy. By seeking and integrating community feedback into the policy, you can build community support for your policy. Some ways you may solicit community feedback are through polling or focus groups. For example, advocates in Rhode Island and New York City polled residents to gauge support for kids' meals nutrition standard policies.¹⁰ This community buy-in may aid in community outreach, press outreach, and event coordination, and overall implementation and enforcement of the policy once it is passed. Tips for community engagement are available through the [CSPI Resource Hub](#).

IDENTIFY ROADBLOCKS TO PASSAGE, IMPLEMENTATION, AND ENFORCEMENT

Before you introduce your policy, you should identify and plan for any roadblocks to the policy or its implementation or enforcement. What risks might come during each step of the process and how might you be able to mitigate them? A couple examples of roadblocks and possible solutions are detailed below.

The health department is unsure how to incorporate the kids' meal policy requirements into its restaurant inspections.

- If the health department has an existing self-certification program in place for other requirements of businesses, they can adapt that system to allow restaurants to self-certify compliance with the policy.
- If there isn't an existing self-certification system, you can help health department staff develop one based on your policy.
- If the health department isn't interested in self-certification, you can create a model checklist for what restaurant inspectors would have to look for when evaluating restaurants for compliance during routine inspections.

Restaurants aren't made aware of the policy and therefore few of them are meeting the policy's requirements.

- You can include specific outreach directives in the bill language and plan for engagement alongside policy development.
- You can begin notifying restaurants of the policy as soon as the policy is passed. Many local governments keep lists of restaurants in their jurisdictions. If this list is available to you, you can use it to ensure no restaurants are falling through the cracks. You can try contacting them by mail, over the phone, or in person. You should develop an informational flier that can be shared with the details of the law and enforcement date. See the "Educational Materials" section for more details.
- If there are too many restaurants in your jurisdiction to contact on your own, you can reach out to local restaurant or business associations to see if they would be willing to notify their member restaurants about the policy.
- You can work with the local government to contact restaurants through existing methods of communication. For example, if the local government informs restaurants when a license is close to expiration, they could include information on the kids' meals policy.
- A tiered enforcement policy that starts with a warning can ensure that restaurants aren't unfairly fined for requirements they were unaware of.



BE FLEXIBLE

Flexibility is one attribute that can make your campaign a success. By adapting and shifting course, you can keep your campaign on track. In addition to identifying potential roadblocks or opponents, you should identify what areas of your policy you can adapt to ensure policy passage.

- Could you shift your implementation period from 6 months to 12 months?
- Could you amend the fine structure to reduce the fines for violations if it would make business owners more supportive of the bill?
- Would you be comfortable allowing sparkling and/or flavored water without any added sweeteners to be healthy default beverages, instead of just plain water?
- These are things to keep in mind, if necessary, to ensure your policy is passed and able to be implemented.

AFTER POLICY PASSAGE

Congratulations, you've passed a kids' meals policy! This next section will help guide you through outreach, education, and other activities post-passage to ensure the policy is implemented and enforced.

DEVELOP AN OUTREACH PLAN

Once the policy is passed you should develop a plan and timeline for outreach, education, and other implementation and enforcement activities. An example timeline is included below. Your timeline can be tweaked based on the policy type (e.g., the timeline for a healthy default beverage bill may be shorter), the implementation period set by the government (e.g., the implementation period may be 18 months), and your community.



EXAMPLE TIMELINE FOR COMPREHENSIVE KIDS' MEALS POLICY IMPLEMENTATION:

Policy requires healthy default beverages, which is implemented and enforced after six months from policy passage, and nutrition standards for at least two kids' meals, which is implemented and enforced after 12 months from policy passage.

MONTH 1: Immediately after policy passage

- Send a press release to local press, coordinate any interview requests
- Share victory on website and social media
- Begin developing outreach and education materials for restaurants and the community
- Meet with partners to develop plans for outreach and education
- Meet with health department about implementation and enforcement



MONTHS 2-6: Before healthy default beverage is implemented

- Prepare additional press release to share with local press about policy implementation, distribute to the press
- Distribute initial outreach and education materials to restaurants and the community
- Organize and host community education and restaurant engagement events with partners
- Continue to meet with health department about implementation and enforcement

MONTHS 7-12: After healthy default beverage policy is implemented and enforced, before nutrition standards are implemented

- Prepare and distribute press release for full policy implementation
- Develop and distribute any additional education and outreach materials
- Continue to host community education and restaurant engagement events
- Check in with health department about enforcement of beverage policy, plan for nutrition standards enforcement, and identify additional ways you can help support their efforts
- Host kickoff event for the full nutrition standards policy at a local restaurant

MONTHS 13-ONWARDS: After policy is fully implemented and enforced

- Continue distributing education materials to community and restaurants
- Periodically follow up with health department on enforcement
- Collect data on restaurant implementation of standards to monitor progress, meet with local researchers to discuss formal evaluation

DEVELOP EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

An important piece of implementation and enforcement is ensuring you get the word out about the policy. There are two main audiences you should be reaching with your outreach once the policy is passed: the community and the restaurant industry.

There are some best practices about communication that can apply to both community and restaurant industry education materials. The reading level of written materials should be at a 6th – 8th grade reading level, which is accessible for most U.S. residents. You can add graphics or colors to your written materials to make them more interesting and appealing, but you should be careful to ensure that there aren't too many graphics or colors that it becomes distracting, or the material can become difficult to read. In addition, if multiple languages are spoken in your community, you should consider translating community and restaurant industry materials into the most commonly spoken languages.

CONDUCT COMMUNITY OUTREACH

There are many ways you can get the word out to your community about the recently passed kids' meals policy, and the best way to reach community members will differ across communities. Consider your own community's day-to-day when developing your community outreach plan. Where do community members congregate? How do people learn of updates in the community? Who or what are the trusted stakeholders/institutions in the community? What are the most important things the community should know about the policy? These are a few of the questions that can inform your educational materials and where you distribute them.

There are plenty of places you can leave educational materials: community centers, places of worship, doctors' or pediatricians' offices, dentists' offices, schools, summer camps, restaurants, libraries, and more.

There may also be other ways to get the word out in your community besides written materials. Is there a local radio show or podcast that can highlight the policy? Could there be PA addresses about the policy at local school sporting events? You can get creative with how you get the word out!

CONDUCT RESTAURANT OUTREACH

Restaurant outreach is a bit more straightforward - to reach the restaurant industry, go to the restaurants. However, that does not mean that it is without its challenges. For example, as stated previously, there may be more restaurants in your community than you can feasibly contact on your own. Creative solutions and partnerships can help supplement your outreach efforts.

Many campaigns have generated written material to support their community outreach efforts. Some examples are available below.

[COMMUNITY EDUCATION MATERIALS](#)

The partners that helped you pass the policy might be able to assist with restaurant outreach. Perhaps you could partner with local restaurant/business associations or the health department to help get the word out to restaurants. If it still seems daunting, how else might you get in touch with restaurants? Instead of visiting in person to share educational materials, could you call them, email them, or send them physical mail?

Given that restaurants are typically busy places, your message might not always reach the person in charge of the menu. With this in mind, it might be best to contact restaurants outside of rush periods to increase the likelihood that your message is passed on to management or that you are able to speak with the person in charge. No matter how you choose to contact restaurants, you should plan to contact them multiple times to increase the likelihood that your message gets through.

Depending on your community, the local restaurant industry or local business associations might be an unlikely ally in community and restaurant outreach and education. After New Orleans (NOLA) passed a healthy default beverage policy in January of 2022,¹¹ the American Heart Association joined forces with the New Orleans Regional Black Chamber of Commerce and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Louisiana to work with the City of New Orleans Health Department and get the word out about the policy. The case study below details how the organizations worked together to inform community members of the policy.

Many campaigns have generated written materials to support their restaurant outreach efforts. Some examples of different materials are available below.

[RESTAURANT OUTREACH MATERIALS](#)





SERVE NOLA KIDS BETTER CASE STUDY

Developed and written by Rica Trigs, American Heart Association

Depending on your community, the local restaurant industry or local business associations might be an unlikely ally in community and restaurant outreach and education. After New Orleans (NOLA) passed a healthy default beverage policy in January of 2022,¹² the American Heart Association joined forces with the New Orleans Regional Black Chamber of Commerce and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Louisiana to work with the City of New Orleans Health Department and get the word out about the policy. The case study below details how the organizations worked together to inform community members of the policy.

The *Serve NOLA Kids Better* policy campaign involved over two years of issue education, coalition building, and strategic tactics related to legislation, communications, and grassroots engagement. This work was led by the American Heart Association (AHA) and an alliance of caregivers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, and community groups. Many people view the legislative vote as the final stage of an advocacy campaign. However, the policy victory starts at the execution of the implementation phase. This is an essential part of the process that ensures the policy can achieve the intended results of positively impacting the health of New Orleans children.



A core group was established to work in partnership with the New Orleans Health Department to ensure the proper execution of this policy. Partners included the AHA, New Orleans Regional Black Chamber of Commerce (NORBCC), and Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Louisiana (HCCL). With a one-year period before the January 2023 effective date, there was adequate time to develop action steps to operationalize the policy objectives.

The Serve NOLA Kids Better Implementation Plan outlined goals and a timeline to ensure a successful roll out of the policy. The leadership of the New Orleans Health Department and their commitment to this policy was instrumental in prioritizing this work while managing many competing issues. They provided expertise and guidance throughout the process, including creating a framework for implementation in the early stages of the campaign. Their understanding of the city's structure and capacity helped with developing the process around reporting and enforcement.

Once the internal plan was finalized, it was time to focus on the people the policy would impact – restaurants and caregivers. Working with the NORBCC and the HCCL helped us reach two target populations that have been disproportionately impacted by unhealthy food options in their communities. These partnerships facilitated conversations about ways to move the needle on positive health outcomes and a deeper dive into the policy's intent. The chambers also provided access to local restaurant owners. This allowed for dialog to better understand challenges to small business operations, such as discussions on sourcing juice boxes and training staff in offering options. This informed the communications strategy and the development of external materials. It also defined the focus areas of additional public education and training for restaurants. For the public, the focus was promoting the message of making the healthier choice the more accessible and available choice. It was not taking away parent choice but helping to shift the culture in making healthier options the norm. For restaurants, clarity was provided regarding the menu and drink offerings as well as equipping staff with tools and tips to uphold the policy.

The implementation strategy also involved events and outreach with both the NORBCC and the HCCL. Implementation included the following engagement: **training** for the health department staff on enforcement; **mailers** with detailed descriptions of the law and enforcement to restaurants; **training and technical assistance** for restaurant staff including a video guide; multimedia campaign to raise awareness for *Serve NOLA Kids Better* including the taglines for Rethink Your Drink and



Our Kids are Sweet Enough to emphasize the harm of excessive sugar intake; shared messaging on social media; and partner events with chambers and restaurant members for general education sessions and activities. Key events include the NORBCC's Annual Extravaganza and a local radio station segment with their executive director, and the HCCL's Conversation & Coffee gathering with women in the Hispanic community.

Policy adoption is not the end of advocacy work, it is the beginning of the next phase. The winning combination for this implementation effort was the early and unwavering commitment of the New Orleans Health Department and the support of the business community through our chamber partners. This was a win-win situation in that it supported and was in alignment with the city's Community Health Improvement Plan and the chambers' health initiatives. The result was a comprehensive New Orleans Kids' Meal default beverage policy that was community-focused from inception to implementation.

POLICY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Research plays an important role in advocacy for food and nutrition policies. It allows us to understand what makes a policy successful, what might be standing in the way of its success, if a policy is being implemented, and if a policy is having its intended impact. You may consider incorporating a research project into your policy campaign.

SAMPLE RESEARCH TOPICS:

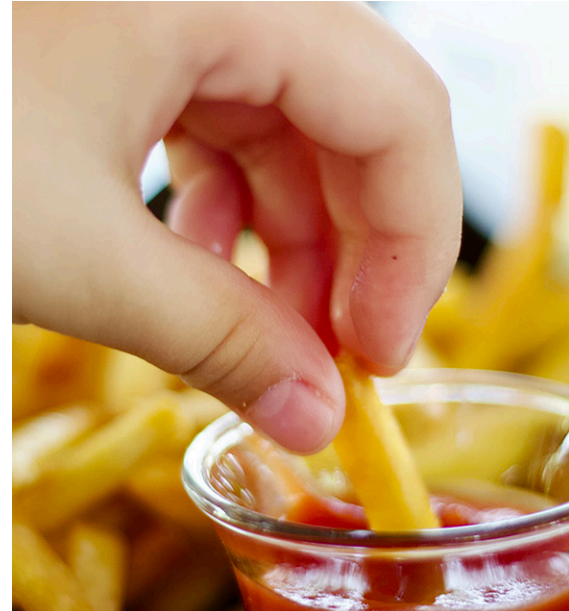
- What items are listed on kids' menus before the policy is passed and what items are listed on kids' menus after the policy has been implemented
- What items are purchased from kids' menu before the policy is passed and what items are purchased after the policy has been implemented
- Interviews or focus groups with restaurant staff and health department staff before policy implementation, during the policy implementation process, and after the policy is implemented
- Polling caregiver interest in healthier kids' meal policies before and after policy passage

You may also consider partnering with educational institutions or researchers for assistance with developing a research plan. In particular, local universities may be interested in evaluating the impact.

ADDRESSING POLICES THAT AREN'T BEING IMPLEMENTED OR ENFORCED

There may be instances where your community has passed a healthy kids' meals policy, but the policy has not been implemented by restaurants or enforced by the health department. In these cases, you can consider amending the policy to boost implementation and enforcement.

An amendment would require your jurisdiction's governing body to pass additional legislation. Our [Restaurant Kids' Meals Toolkit](#) has tips on how to pass a kids' meals policy that may be helpful to your efforts to pass an amendment. In addition, many of the suggestions here may be beneficial when pursuing an amendment, such as ensuring community buy-in, building strong and diverse coalitions, ensuring enforcing body buy-in, and post-policy passage community and restaurant engagement.



Before setting out to pass an amendment to your kids' meals policy, you should ensure that you've identified all the barriers to implementation and enforcement in your jurisdiction. Are restaurants struggling to implement the policy? Is the enforcing body aware of the policy, or are they having a hard time enforcing it? Could the enforcing body provide better informational resources or issue guidance to help restaurants understand their obligations under the law? It is important to identify all barriers before getting started so that you can address them all in your amendment. During this exercise, you may learn that you don't need an amendment and might be able to employ some of the strategies suggested in this toolkit to boost implementation and enforcement.

Your amendment may add an incentive for restaurants that comply with the policy, or a disincentive for those that do not comply with the policy. For example, your amendment may stipulate that compliant restaurants may receive window clings indicating they provide healthy kids' options in compliance with the law, or it may require that a list of non-compliant restaurants be kept and made easily available to the public. The amendment could also reduce the burden on the enforcing body and restaurants, such as by creating a self-certification system to indicate compliance, or by creating a sliding scale for non-compliance fees based on the number of locations a restaurant has (smallest fee for businesses with one location, highest fee for chain restaurants with 20 or more locations). You may be able to adopt language from [already passed policies](#) or from a [model policy](#) for your amendment.

LEARNING MORE

Your implementation and enforcement learning doesn't need to end here. The CSPI Resource Hub aims to build the skills, knowledge, and capacity of our grantees, emerging partners, and networks through coordinated webinars, trainings, and resources on kids' meals, implementation and enforcement, and other food and nutrition topics. To learn more, visit the [Resource Hub webpage](#).

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