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An audit of vending machines in public places in regional NSW, Australia

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An audit of vending machines in public places in regional NSW, Australia

Abstract

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Keywords

australia, nsw, regional, public, machines, places, audit, vending

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AN AUDIT OF VENDING MACHINES IN PUBLIC PLACES IN REGIONAL NSW, AUSTRALIA

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Background and objectives: Vending machines are widespread in public spaces, providing ready access to predominantly high-energy food and beverages. This study aimed to describe the type and frequency of foods available in vending machines in selected public spaces in regional NSW.

Methods: A quantitative audit of vending machines in Wollongong Hospital, University of Wollongong campuses, and surrounding suburbs was completed using a survey tool adapted from a similar audit of train station platforms in NSW. Information on the type of and cost of food and drink products available, and signage on the exterior of machines was collected. Healthy food items were defined as those with less than 600 kJ per serve, and healthy beverages as those with less than 300 kJ per serve.

Results: Wollongong Hospital contained 21 vending machines with 498 occupied slots for food or beverages. Among the 498 slots, 48.2% were beverages and 51.8% were snack foods. Among the beverage items, 71.8% were classified as healthy beverages; and among the snack foods, 49.6% were classified as healthy. On UOW campuses and 6 surrounding suburbs, 55 vending machines were identified. Among the 1662 slots, 61.8% of slots were beverages, and 38.2% were snack foods. Among the beverage items, 39.2% were classified as healthy beverages (mostly water); and among the snack foods, only 3.4% were classified as healthy snack foods (most unhealthy snack foods were chips, chocolate and confectionary).

Conclusions: Vending machines in public places may cumulatively contribute to excess energy consumption and poor diet quality as many available items are energy dense and nutrient poor. Interventions are required in public places to improve the public's access to healthy food and beverages.

Key words: food environment, food availability, food promotion, vending machines.