

LEADING THE  
TRANSITION TO **HEALTHY** AND  
**SUSTAINABLE** FOOD  
IN HEALTHCARE



## Leading the transition to healthy and sustainable food in healthcare

Sustainable food in healthcare is steadily progressing<sup>1</sup> - but whilst there is continuing momentum to build a more sustainable future, there are still many challenges and barriers to healthcare's procurement of sustainable and healthy food, as well as prevention and reduction of food waste. Through implementing healthy and sustainable food policies and practices, healthcare facilities can not only protect the environment and the health of communities, but also support local economies and educate employees, patients, and families about healthy eating.

### Recommendations for a healthy and sustainable food procurement strategy

1. **Connect and engage with your team**, integrate input from all departments (health professionals, kitchen, administration; even patients and visitors) to assess your current practices, and consider how sustainability could be further improved within your procurement policies.
  - a **Ask where your food comes from**: assess related impacts upon health, society, economy, and the environment.
  - b **Include vending machines in your policy**: procure healthier, and Fairtrade products instead of beverages and foods high in fats, sugar, and/or salt.
2. **Work with local producers** when procuring - thereby reducing food miles and food waste at source. This reduces reliance on expensive processed foods, and makes it easier to source fresh, local, seasonal, and organic produce.
3. **Reduce meat portions** and/or substitute with other high-protein products such as fish, eggs, cheese, and plant-based products from organic and sustainable sources.
4. **Offer more plant-derived foods** i.e. fruits, vegetables, whole grains, pulses, and nuts. Offer vegetarian/vegan dishes on a daily basis, and ensure that fresh fruit is always available.
5. **Highlight the "healthiest option(s)" on menus and in cafeterias**, e.g. with a small icon, thus enabling everyone to make informed food choices and reinforcing food as a fundamental part of prevention-based healthcare.
6. **Develop alternative menu systems** e.g. verbal or electronic menus allowing patients to choose their meals closer to meal times. Consider ways of allowing patients to select a variety of foods, textures, and portion sizes.
7. **Raise awareness and educate all health professionals** about healthy and sustainable food in their training. Ward staff should be taught the importance of patient malnutrition screening.
8. **Embrace the educational/community role of hospitals**; show staff, patients, and visitors how to change their food habits. Organise farm field trips, tasting sessions, cookery demonstrations, and other activities to encourage participants to prepare meals in a healthier, more sustainable way.
9. **Communicate your healthy and sustainable food policy** to staff via newsletters and website(s). Look for peer-based learning opportunities and networks to leverage the purchasing power of healthcare institutions.
10. **Celebrate wins and regularly assess procurement policies** to guarantee high quality and nutritional requirements are met, with positive economical and environmental impacts.

### Recommendations for preventing and reducing food waste

1. **Carry out regular satisfaction surveys** to better align with patients' preferences and dietary habits. Consider changing menus to remove the most unpopular items or dishes according to your survey results.
2. **Improve communication between the kitchen and wards** to improve accurate information about the number of patients requiring meals and their preferences/requirements.
3. **Monitor and measure food waste** (weight and cost) - evaluate what food items are wasted the most and where (i.e. kitchen, canteen, and wards) via either visual estimates and/or directly weighing. Report the results to employees and patients to raise awareness about food waste.
4. **Train kitchen and ward staff** about the different stages of food waste management, such as efficient storage, standard-sized serving utensils, and alternatives to disposal.
5. **Establish a simplified and flexible food ordering procedure** with opportunities for meal cancellations, and provide an "in-between" meal service, if needed.
6. **Ensure that patients are offered different portion sizes** (large, standard, or small portions) and assist patients to make informed decisions about the appropriate portion size, nutritional content, and any alternative meals available.
7. **Establish protected meal times** to allow patients to take their time to eat without being interrupted.
8. **Provide help to those who have limited manual dexterity or strength** for tasks such as opening containers, cutting meat, or peeling fruit.
9. **Organise working groups** (patients, administrative and kitchen staff, and healthcare professionals), to discuss different culinary innovations e.g. adjusting meals to suit patients' specific requirements, presentation ideas, and share the facility's food waste strategy.
10. **Explore creative and alternative uses for leftovers** to produce new recipes and improve meal presentation. Consider redistributing surplus food through donation to charitable schemes or converting it to energy.

## Final considerations


Healthcare facilities have an important role to play in creating healthier and sustainable food systems that guarantee environmental stewardship, maintenance of local economies, animal welfare, and protection of health and wellbeing for all citizens.

**We therefore encourage YOU to take action and become part of the global sustainable healthcare movement by leading the change towards sustainable food policies at your healthcare facility. Join HCWH Europe and the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals (GGHH) network to share, learn, and connect with other sustainable healthcare leaders.**

[noharm-europe.org](http://noharm-europe.org) / [greenhospitals.net](http://greenhospitals.net)



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