

Program Overview

The Programs

Eat Smart! is an Award of Excellence program that recognizes and promotes Ontario food premises that meet standards of excellence in nutrition, food safety and compliance with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. The goal of the program is to contribute to the reduction of food-borne illness and chronic diseases in Ontario.

There are four program components:

- Eat Smart!* Ontario's Healthy Restaurant Program
- Eat Smart!* School Program
- Eat Smart!* Workplace Program
- Eat Smart!* Recreation Centre Program

Program Origins

Eat Smart! Ontario's Healthy Restaurant Program was initiated in 1997. Founding partners included: Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Canadian Cancer Society (Ontario Division), Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Toronto Public Health, local Public Health Units, local Heart Health Programs, the food service industry and Ontario consumers. Toronto Public Health led the program development and provincial launch in 1999. The *Eat Smart!* program was transferred from Toronto Public Health to the Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) in 2001.

The *Eat Smart!* School and Workplace Programs were launched in 2001. Increasing interest in food choices in school and workplace cafeterias have led to a rapid expansion of these programs in recent years. The cafeteria programs can be integrated into comprehensive school and workplace health initiatives.

Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL), announced in June 2006, included expansion of *Eat Smart!* into recreation centres. NRC developed and pilot tested the Recreation Centre Program, which includes a nutrition standard for snack bars and for vending machines, within seven health unit jurisdictions in 2008. The Recreation Centre Program will be launched provincially in January 2010.

How it Works

Eat Smart! is provincial program coordinated and supported by staff at the Nutrition Resource Centre (1.3 FTE RDs) with annual funding from the Ministry of Health Promotion. NRC develops and

manages the infrastructure for the program, which includes development/updating of the program standards, development of program communication and support materials, and maintenance of the provincial website and listserv for public health units staff who implement the program. NRC's coordination efforts are guided by a Provincial Advisory Committee.

Eat Smart! programs are implemented locally by participating public health units and their community partners. Health unit participation in *Eat Smart!* is voluntary but many health units choose to implement the program in fulfillment of certain requirements in the Ontario Public Health Standards. Interested food premises apply to the program and are assessed by local health unit staff to determine eligibility. Establishments that meet the three standards of excellence receive an award certificate and are listed on the provincial website: www.EatSmartOntario.ca. Additional promotions are determined locally.

Program Stats

	Number of <i>Eat Smart!</i> award winners 2008*	Number of <i>Eat Smart!</i> award winners 2007*	%Change	Number of participating health units 2008 (There are 36 health units)
Restaurants	487	551	- 12%	20
School Cafeterias	234	229	+ 2%	20
Workplace Cafeterias	153	153	No change	20
Recreation Centre Pilot Program	20 (facilities were not awarded)	N/A	N/A	7

*Numbers are based on the *Eat Smart!* Annual Summary Reports for corresponding years except for the Recreation Centre Pilot Program.

Current Program Activities

■ Discontinuation of provincial support for the Restaurant Program

Over the past few years, challenges with implementation of the program coupled with a shifting landscape in which the restaurant program operates in Ontario, have led to a decline in the participation by both health units and restaurants. The decision to discontinue provincial support to the program will enable NRC to place more focus on provincial coordination of the School, Workplace and Recreation Centre Programs. Provincial support for a pilot of the Health Check™ food service program in restaurants is also currently underway. Several health units are still implementing the *Eat Smart!* Restaurant Program and some will continue into 2010. There is a possibility that a few may choose to continue to implement the program without provincial support.

- **Development of provincial resources to “replace” the Restaurant Program**

Preliminary plans are underway to develop two provincial resources as a way to preserve elements of the *Eat Smart!* Restaurant Program and link consumers to EatRight Ontario. One of the resources will be directed to restaurant operators of family-style restaurants to support efforts to offer healthier fare for their customers; it will be based on the Nutrition Standard for the *Eat Smart!* Restaurant Program. The other resource, targeted to the same target audience originally defined for the program (dual income families with children living at home), will provide information and tips on eating healthier away from home. Development of these resources is still under discussion with MHP and the Provincial Partners. If plans move forward, it is anticipated that these resources could be available by the latter half of 2010.

- **Development of four new program standards for Schools and Workplaces**

Consultation with the field and a review of the literature show that it's appropriate and timely to incorporate four additional program standards that will address (1) pricing, (2) product placement, and (3) promotional strategies that will encourage and support consumers to make healthier food choices; and (4) the creation of healthy eating “action committees” within participating schools and workplaces. Schools and workplaces have been identified as supportive environments in which to make a healthy behaviour changes as this is where students and employees spend a large part of their day. Inclusion of these new program standards will promote a stronger more comprehensive approach to healthy eating in these environments and support behavior change.

- **Outcome evaluation study**

The NRC is involved in a research study of the *Eat Smart!* Program in the workplace setting. The results of this study will help to address the lack of outcome evaluation of the program. The intent of this research, which was funded by a grant received by McGill University from the Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR), is to ascertain whether the *Eat Smart!* program resulted in behaviour change among consumers in workplaces compared to control sites where the program was not implemented. Data collection for the study spanned from October 2008 to May 2009. Results of the analysis are expected in spring 2010.

- **Alignment of the Nutrition Standard for the School Program with the Ministry of Education’s School Food and Beverage Policy**

The Ministry of Education will be releasing a nutrition policy and accompanying nutrition standards applicable to all publicly-funded schools in Ontario. These are expected to be released later this fall. Following the release of the nutrition policy and standards the NRC will consult with our Provincial Advisory Committee on aligning the *Eat Smart!* School Program with the Ministry of Education policy and standards. The *Eat Smart!* School Program will be supported and promoted by the Ministry of Education as a practical support to the school food and beverage policy.

For more information on the Eat Smart! Program please contact:

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www.EatSmartOntario.ca / www.AVotreSanteOntario.ca