

DHS-OHA Healthy Meetings, Conferences and Events Policy (MSC-010-019) Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Healthy Meetings Policy?

The policy requires all employees who plan meetings that are sponsored with state money to do three key things:

- 1) Make accommodations for meeting participants to breastfeed or pump breast milk.
- 2) Offer breaks for voluntary movement/activity, at least 10 minutes for every hour of meeting.
- 3) When food is allowed to be purchased for a meeting (i.e., per grant guidelines and/or standard agency policy), make a good faith effort to align with the *USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. That means emphasizing whole grains, lean protein, low-fat dairy, and plenty of fruits and vegetables. In addition:
 - No food can be purchased for meetings lasting less than three hours, unless the meeting occurs over a meal time.
 - No state money can be used to purchase sugary beverages.
 - No state money can be used to purchase fried foods like donuts.

2. Why are we doing this?

For DHS and OHA leaders, managers and staff, this policy speaks to our core values and agency needs. Mostly, it's an issue of integrity. We know that eating a healthy diet and moving more are key to preventing the major chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes and some cancers, including breast and colon cancer. Our agencies work to prevent and manage these, every day. Our walk should match our talk.

It's also an issue of being good stewards of public money. DHS and OHA devote significant resources to programs that prevent and manage disease, and should not spend state funds on meetings that may undermine health. This is also important since many employee and client health care costs are paid for by the state.

DHS and OHA are also uniquely positioned to use policy to support healthier choices and serve as role models to help to create a new social norm around healthier choices – also known as creating a “culture of health.” This policy also demonstrates that we value employee satisfaction and wellness.

3. Does this really matter?

Currently, 85 cents of every dollar in our health system is spent on disease caused by and exacerbated by physical inactivity and poor nutrition.

Nearly half of most people's waking hours are spent at work, and many of those hours are spent in meetings and conferences. Foods available at meetings and conferences are often high in fat, added sugars, and sodium, and contain few fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Meetings also generally involve a lot of time sitting, which reduces concentration, productivity, and energy levels. Poor nutrition and physical inactivity are among the top drivers of chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes and some cancers.

Women who need to breastfeed or pump breast milk are often deterred from this practice by facilities that don't accommodate them with an appropriate private place. Breastfeeding has been shown to benefit infants against later obesity.

4. How will this affect our clients?

Most of our meetings and conferences involve employees and community partners rather than clients. However, where client populations are part of meetings (e.g., therapy groups), the policy changes will establish practices that better support their health. This is in line with the widely shared goal for the “triple aim” of better health, better health care and lower costs.

Aside from the policy, DHS and OHA also have a wide variety of initiatives woven into our existing programs that are helping clients live healthier, such as by accessing tobacco cessation and healthy food options.

5. How is the policy inclusive of diverse cultural backgrounds, races/ethnicities, disability status, religions, sexual orientation and other diversity factors?

Supporting opportunities for breastfeeding or pumping breast milk is simply that: providing opportunity. The policy in no way compels a mother of an infant to breastfeed, if that is not their personal ability or preference.

Supporting opportunities to move during meeting breaks simply creates time on the agenda and encouragement to move. Whether people choose to get up or not, stretch, walk or roll, use the bathroom or take care of other needs is completely their choice. Meeting facilitators who suggest or offer guided activities should be mindful of being inclusive, such as by offering a range of options for seated and standing activities.

For food and beverage purchase, the policy requires a good faith effort be made to align with the *USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, which are consistent with the foods – especially traditional foods rather than highly commercial foods – of many diverse communities. In fact, communities of color and other minority groups have often been the prime targets of intensive marketing and promotion efforts of some of the most unhealthy food and beverage products, in a way that makes these products seem like the norm.

Also note that policy guidelines specify that a good faith effort is required. In good faith, there could be a cultural or educational need (and significant community expectation) for a specific food or beverage that is otherwise prohibited by the policy. In this case there can be exceptions, and staff should work with their managers to assess this.

6. Does the policy apply to food that an employee brings into a meeting, potlucks or party, if the employee paid for the food?

No.

While the policy does not officially apply to food that employees purchase and bring to a meeting, potluck or party, we ask that all staff consider the policy and make healthy choices when bringing food to share with coworkers. Surveys show that over 90 percent of state employees are trying to lose or maintain weight, and a majority are trying to eat better. We all can help promote a culture of health and wellness within DHS and OHA.

7. Does the policy apply to regular meetings, or just special meetings and conferences?

The policy applies to all DHS and OHA meetings.

8. Does the policy apply to our meetings, classes and events even when they are not happening on DHS or OHA property?

Yes, the policy applies to all DHS and OHA meetings, regardless of location.

9. Does the policy apply to meetings and events happening in 24-hour or small residential facilities, such as the Oregon State Hospital or Stabilization and Crisis Unit group homes?

Yes, the policy applies to these places as well.

10. Does the policy apply to meetings happening in DHS or OHA buildings, even if the sponsor is not DHS or OHA?

No. DHS and OHA policy does not apply to other agencies.

11. The policy says that it applies to meetings “sponsored by OHA and DHS.” What does this mean?

“Sponsored by” means that the cost of the meeting is funded by the agency. This includes convening the meeting, providing staff time, and providing facilities and/or other resources for the meeting.

12. Will foods and beverages cost more to comply with this policy? If so, what is the funding source?

In many cases, foods and beverages should not cost more. For example, asking a caterer to provide low-fat milk instead of whole milk, to roast vegetables instead of fry them, or to provide a fruit cup instead of cheesecake for dessert should not cost more.

Our policy is helping us rethink whether we need to purchase and serve at all, if a meeting is not during meal-time. As a result of the adoption of this policy, the agency may purchase less food overall. In addition, if portion sizes align with the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans, we may spend less.

Some healthy foods can be more expensive. DHS and OHA leaders also want to let employees know that while the agencies strive to be good stewards of public funds and spend within our means, this does not mean that the cheapest possible food must be purchased, especially if that makes it poor quality, unhealthy food.

13. Why shouldn't I serve sugar-sweetened beverages?

Sugar-sweetened beverages like soda provide little or no nutritional value, are the single largest source of calories in the American diet, and contribute to increased risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and tooth decay. Also, these liquid calories do not make us feel as full as when we consume a food with the same number of calories, which can lead to higher calorie intake overall. Substitutes for sugar-sweetened beverages include water, flavored waters, seltzers, coffee, unsweetened iced tea, and other low- and no- calorie beverages.

14. What resources are available to support staff and managers to implement the policy and organize successful meetings?

Sample menus, sample movement breaks and webinar training are available on the DHS-OHA Intranet web site. In addition, many DHS programs and OHA divisions have wellness committees, and their members may be a resource. Technical assistance requests can be directed to the contact information contained in the policy.

15. How will implementation of this policy be evaluated?

Within the first year of implementation, staff will be surveyed to understand to what extent the policy is in being successfully implemented, understand any barriers, and take feedback that staff have on the policy.

All planners of large meetings and conferences where there is an evaluation are also encouraged to include questions on how participants found the lactation accommodation, physical activity breaks, and foods and beverages.