
MENU LABELLING

Menu labelling has become a popular policy and/or regulatory initiative in a number of jurisdictions as a way to inform consumers about an attribute of the food item. The current focus to address the high rates of obesity has resulted in a demand for caloric content of certain restaurant food.

About one quarter of Canadians purchase foods from quick service restaurants and it is estimated that Americans consume about one third of their calories away from home. With more than a quarter of the population considered obese, the information provided on menus or menu boards is thought to influence the type and/or quantity of food purchased, thereby helping to combat the obesity epidemic.

Canada

Although there are no national regulations in Canada to identify nutrition related information on menus or menu boards, there have been a number of initiatives aimed at providing that information.

In British Columbia, the Informed Dining Program is mandatory in retail food service establishments operating in a BC health authority owned or operated health care facility. Calorie and sodium information is provided before or at the point of ordering. In addition, this program is voluntary for restaurants and a number choose to post the caloric content directly on the menu boards. Restaurants Canada supports this initiative throughout the country.

In November 2014, Ontario re-introduced legislation that, if passed, would require large chain food service facilities, with 20 or more locations in Ontario, to post calories on menus and menu boards. This legislation is a component of the Healthy Kids Strategy (see BAC Obesity Fact Sheet).

United States

In November 2014, the US Food and Drug Administration finalized two rules which require caloric information be listed on menus and menu boards in chain restaurants, similar retail food establishments and vending machines with 20 or more locations (FDA-2011-F-0172 and FDA-2011-F-0171).