



VIEWS ON A TORONTO PUBLIC HEALTH MENU LABELLING PILOT PROJECT

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

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Introduction

Toronto Public Health is considering a pilot project to demonstrate the feasibility of menu labelling in Toronto restaurants. To inform the planning of the pilot project, research and stakeholder consultations were undertaken beginning in the summer of 2011 and continuing through to December 2012. The purpose of the research and consultations was to assess interest and readiness for menu labelling and to obtain feedback on the proposed menu labelling pilot project. Consumers, independently owned/operated restaurants, chain/franchise restaurants, and restaurant associations participated in the research and/or consultations.

This report provides findings from the consultations conducted with independently owned/operated restaurants, chains/franchises, and restaurant associations. Each section describes the respective stakeholder's views on the benefits and drawbacks of menu labelling and on the proposed menu labelling pilot project.

A separate discussion paper (TPH, 2013) synthesizes TPH background research on menu labelling as an intervention that can help establish healthier food environments. Background research included: a review of the data on eating out behaviour; a review of the literature on environmental barriers to healthy eating out, the effectiveness of menu labelling as a health intervention, and menu labelling policy experiences in other jurisdictions; and TPH commissioned research to assess readiness for menu labelling from the perspective of Toronto consumers and independently-owned/operated and chain/franchise restaurants in Toronto.¹

Proposed pilot project parameters

The goal of the pilot project is to engage 10-20 independently owned/operated restaurants and 2-5 smaller chains/franchises that will analyse their menus and provide calorie and sodium values² for all standard menu items on their menu or menu board. The intent is to provide restaurants with guidance on how to conduct a nutritional analysis on their menu and provide free computer software to those that require it to conduct their own nutritional analysis (See appendix 1 for an overview of the proposed menu labelling pilot project).

Independently Owned/Operated Restaurants

Consultations were carried out with 13 independently owned/operated restaurants in Toronto from August – November 2012. This group of restaurants included representation from across the city, quick service

¹ The key findings of this background research include the following: Canadians spend a considerable portion of their food dollars on eating out; there are environmental barriers to eating healthy that menu labelling can help reduce; there is modest evidence that menu labelling can lead to healthier food choices; Toronto residents would like to have nutrition information about the food consumed when eating out; there is moderate support for providing customers with nutrition information and interest in participating in a pilot project with TPH among a minority of independent restaurants; and chains/franchises are not supportive of menu labelling.

² During the consultations, restaurants were asked for their views on including calorie, sodium, and fat values on the menu; however, based on further review by Toronto Public Health, a decision was made for the pilot to focus on calories and sodium only.

and sit-down only, varied cuisines, and breakfast/lunch/dinner-focused. The consultation guide can be found in Appendix 2 and a description of the restaurants can be found in Appendix 3.

Selection of consultation participants

In December 2011, Toronto Public Health (TPH) commissioned an online survey of independently owned/operated restaurants to assess their views on providing nutrition information to their customers. A total of 256 restaurants responded to the survey. At the end of the survey, restaurants were asked if they would be willing to be contacted by TPH about working on a pilot project focused on providing nutrition information to restaurant customers. Eighty respondents provided their contact information. An email was sent to these 80 respondents asking them to provide us with information about their restaurant. Of those, 22 responded. To further guide our planning of a pilot project, we invited these 22 restaurant operators to meet with us to discuss the parameters of the pilot project. Sixteen restaurants accepted our invitation but four meetings were cancelled by the restaurant due to scheduling issues on their part. One more restaurant that did not participate in the survey was consulted based on a recommendation of another independent operator.

Overall views on menu labelling

Restaurant operators were asked to comment on menu labelling as an overall strategy as well as their capacity to participate in the proposed pilot project.

Overall, there was support for a menu labelling initiative among the 13 independent restaurant operators; however, a small number expressed skepticism about menu labelling as a strategy for encouraging healthy eating. Three operators indicated that customers were interested in nutritional information about what they were eating, whereas five indicated that there is no demand for this information. Their customers were not asking for this kind of information; they were primarily concerned with allergens. One owner/operator argued that consumers need to take responsibility for what they are eating.

Overall, 11 of the 13 restaurants indicated that they would still be willing to participate in the pilot, as long as there are supports in place for them to offset the costs. Two others would need to consider it further once the parameters of the pilot were finalized. One of these operators noted that menu labelling would be easier for chain restaurants with a very standardized menu with no variations, and the other explained that small businesses, like their restaurant, are just trying to stay afloat in a very competitive environment where the only way to compete with large chains is to lower their prices and thereby lower their revenue. She added that menu labelling would be better suited to larger, sit-down restaurants with at least 15 tables rather than a predominantly quick-service restaurant like hers.

Several operators commented on whether menu labelling should be mandatory or voluntary for independent restaurants. A couple of operators indicated that the program would only have value if it was voluntary; it would not provide a competitive edge if everyone was mandated to do it. A few people indicated that restaurants are faced with so much regulation already that *"they feel handcuffed."* Three operators identified quality assurance mechanisms to be important and that restaurants should be fined for not-participating or making fraudulent claims.

Everyone understood that the pilot would be evaluated and did not have any concerns with participating in the evaluation. One operator indicated that although he would be willing to participate, he would not feel comfortable providing information on revenue. One operator emphasized the importance of historical data (e.g. revenue) to account for variability in the restaurant industry over time.

Benefits of menu labelling

The main perceived benefit of menu labelling for these restaurants is incurring more business as a result of providing nutrition information. Providing this service would give them a competitive advantage against chains. A couple of operators qualified the potential of menu labelling to serve as a marketing tool; it would only serve this role if it was a voluntary program. Most of these restaurant operators considered their menu to be more health-oriented. They pointed out that they use fresh ingredients, no preservatives, local produce, and/or grill their meat instead of deep frying it, so they also hoped that menu labelling would give them a way of promoting the healthfulness of their menu. As one owner explained, *“If people know that we cook just like they do, it removes an impediment to dining out frequently – it's not a guilty pleasure.”* Another indicated that he wants to change consumers' perceptions that Indian food is unhealthy: *“I want to prepare myself for a future role as a healthy Indian restaurant.”*

Comments suggested that these restaurant operators want to be ahead of the curve; three operators explicitly indicated that they wanted to lead the way:

“I want to be the first guy.”

“The time has come for [menu labelling].... I want to move ahead with it.”

“Someday it's going to be the 'in' thing. ... I want to be a pioneer. I want to be there.”

Three restaurant operators had considered providing nutritional information to their customers in the past but did not proceed due to the costs involved or the belief that the information would not be trusted if it wasn't provided by a credible third party.

Although most were motivated by what they stood to gain from participating, six operators also indicated that menu labelling would benefit their customers. Two restaurants indicated that they had made changes to their menu to create more healthy choices for their customers. A restaurant within a university campus indicated that they have a responsibility to educate students and they want to promote themselves as a "caring" restaurant.

Drawbacks of menu labelling

The main concern for most operators was the costs involved in menu labelling, primarily the staff time to conduct the nutritional analysis. Several operators explained that they are operating with a very low profit margin, they are stretched to the limit, and are operating in a very competitive environment. One owner estimated that it would take about one month or 40 hours of staff time to analyze the whole menu.

If the computer software is not provided by TPH, it would also be a significant impediment to most restaurants. A few operators indicated a willingness to make a modest investment in the software. A small number of operators identified producing and printing a new menu (with nutrition information included) to be a significant cost.

Four operators also indicated that restaurants in Toronto are disproportionately affected by legislation and menu labelling would pose additional costs. *“Restaurants are overly picked on... they're a tempting focus.”* A small number of operators suggested that investing in menu labelling does not make business sense unless there is a return on investment, and they were not sure that there would be an adequate return.

Six operators also spoke of various practical challenges to menu labelling, such as providing inaccurate information as a result of ingredient substitutions, use of exotic ingredients, and/or last minute changes to the recipe. Operators explained that these events are more common in independent restaurants. The cook/chef might modify the recipe if a certain vegetable is not available or in season, or may tweak a recipe to improve the taste. Cooks/chefs are also more likely to exercise flexibility or spontaneity in the kitchen of independent restaurants because they are not as standardized.

Some other concerns expressed by a small number of operators included:

- not having sufficient nutrition knowledge;
- the confidentiality of their recipes being compromised;
- disclosing information on high calorie items;
- the perceived credibility or accuracy of the nutritional information; and
- a cluttered menu/menu presentation.

Another unique perspective was that menu labelling would not be well received by fine dining establishments because it would limit their capacity to differentiate themselves from chain restaurants and they could be perceived as less prestigious.

Finally, one owner commented that restaurants respond to peer pressure and would participate in menu labelling but this would result in many different approaches being adopted. This would make the program ineffective as it would be confusing to customers. This person argued that a standardized approach should be implemented with different levels of requirements based on the size and type of restaurant.

Views on key features of the proposed pilot project

Key nutrient values (calorie, sodium, and fat) for standard items on the menu

All 13 operators either explicitly or implicitly supported providing calorie, sodium, and fat values for all standard items. All operators were shown two different methods of providing nutrition information to customers: a) a sample menu from a restaurant that participated in the Tacoma-Pierce County SmartMenu program that included calorie, sodium, fat, and carbohydrate values under each menu item; and b) a sample Nutrition Information Brochure from a restaurant participating in B.C.'s Informed Dining program which included values for calories plus all 13 nutrients found on a Nutrition Facts table. How this approach could be adapted for menu boards/take out menus was explained to quick service and buffet restaurant operators.

Most operators favoured the SmartMenu approach and indicated that it would be reasonable to implement. One explicitly indicated a preference for the Informed Dining Program approach, and one could see benefits of both approaches. Responses to the two approaches included:

Informed Dining Program Nutrition Information Brochure

"It's too confusing. People won't use it. People's attention span is short."

"Only people who care will look through it. It's singing to the choir."

SmartMenu

"You look, you see, you know."

"It's a lot less intrusive than I thought it would be."

Two operators offered a couple of other menu labelling options for TPH to consider:

- use symbols to designate healthy and unhealthy choices in terms of calorie, sodium, and fat values or use symbols to designate healthy options only; and
- present the nutrient values as a percentage of the daily value rather than the absolute values, as the latter may not mean anything to most people.

Most operators wanted assurance that only standard menu items would be included as a program requirement as they have daily specials that would be difficult to analyze. Although it was made clear that specials would be excluded, a few still expressed concerns that customers might begin asking for nutritional information on daily specials if it was available for all other menu options.

Three operators said they would prefer providing nutrition information for only a portion of the menu such as their most popular items or the core ingredients of many menu items. Three specialize in East Indian cuisine (one being a buffet restaurant) and one in Asian cuisine. One operator of East Indian cuisine indicated that he would like to develop a fixed course menu for which it would be easier to provide nutritional information because otherwise most dishes are shared and customers would have to add up the calories from various dishes. Others indicated that most dishes include the same core ingredients, so it would be challenging to present the nutritional information for all the variations on the menu.

One operator commented on the inclusion of drinks. He did not see the value of including calorie information on drinks, especially alcoholic drinks, and noted that most unmixed drinks would not have sodium or fat content.

Nutritional analysis via computer software

All except one operator liked the option of using computer software to conduct nutritional analysis. One owner argued that laboratory testing, although more expensive, would yield more accurate results. Several others noted that reaching 100% accuracy was difficult with either software or laboratory analysis but given the high cost of the latter, using software was preferable.

One owner indicated that the Ontario Restaurant, Hotel & Motel Association (ORHMA) had developed a program to assist member restaurants to conduct nutritional analyses.

A few operators were concerned that they would not be able to guarantee 100% accuracy of the nutrition information and they were worried about the risk to their reputation for providing inaccurate information.

Restaurant recognition

Operators saw the restaurant recognition component as the return on the investment in menu labelling and believed it could help boost business.

One owner believed that the program would work better for restaurants if, in addition to providing nutritional information, the program developed a standard by which to rank restaurants by the healthfulness of their menu, akin to the VQA model of rating wines (e.g., bronze, silver, gold categories). This would only work, he asserted, if menu labelling was a voluntary program with clear, strict standards, and quality control mechanisms, and was well promoted.

"This provides a reward and helps discriminate those who do it better.... You'll get a normal distribution of restaurants if there is good promotion of the program.... Nobody wants a by-law but everyone wants a reward.... Put a carrot out, and let them come out to it.... If we're all floating in the same lake, [then there is no competitive advantage to participating]."

He emphasized the need of a regulatory environment that rewards compliance and severely punishes fraud. He did not have a concern with menu labelling compliance being the role of TPH inspectors. They are helpful, he explained, and this would be a natural extension of TPH inspectors' role. One suggestion for monitoring compliance was to conduct three random checks annually.

Supports required to participate in the pilot project

The most important support that restaurants indicated they require to participate in the pilot project is full coverage or a subsidy of the costs of nutritional analysis. Eleven people indicated that free computer software would enable them to participate and more than half said that they would also need support to conduct the nutritional analysis. Most of these restaurants were asked if they would be open to having a university student in a Nutrition program complete the analysis for them, if TPH were to strike a partnership with a university. All who were asked about this possibility were comfortable with this option. One person indicated his preference for doing the nutritional analysis in-house was based on wanting to safeguard their recipes. A unique idea for defraying the overall costs of the pilot project was to seek corporate sponsorship.

Those who indicated that they preferred to conduct the nutritional analysis on their own indicated that they would need sufficient time to do this and were pleased with the proposed timeline of several months.

Several other supports were mentioned by one or two people, including:

- support to standardize recipes;
- nutrition education for staff; and
- support to re-design the menu.

Several people commented on the value of being recognized or receiving promotion for participating in the program. One owner suggested using Eat Smart as the brand.

Suggestions for pilot project recruitment

Operators were asked if they could suggest other restaurants that might be interested in participating in the pilot. In addition to a few specific suggestions that were made, one or two operators suggested that we focus on restaurants that are high profile, health-oriented, sit-down only, and/or larger chains.

Chains/Franchises

TPH commissioned key informant interviews with executives of both large and small chains in Toronto in order to assess attitudes toward provision of nutrition information via menu/menu board. Interviews were conducted with nine chains in February 2012. The interviews revealed that large chain and franchise restaurants are not very supportive of menu labelling, a position that is consistent with those of prominent industry associations. These restaurants indicated that they are already providing nutrition information to their customers, there is no consumer demand for menu labelling, and that there is limited evidence that

consumers use the information presented on the menu in other jurisdictions where menu labelling is taking place (Mah, Thomas, & Thang, 2013).

However, it is the aim of the proposed pilot project to also include chains/franchises as they represent a large proportion of restaurants in Toronto. For this reason, we pursued meeting with several chains/franchises which had not been included in the key informant study to explore their views on the proposed pilot project.

Six chains/franchises participated in consultations which were held in November and December 2012. This group represented a variety of cuisines, different types of sit-down restaurants (e.g., a breakfast-focused, pub, and café) and quick service chains. Three have locations outside Canada. A description of these chains can be found in Appendix 3, and the names of chains that were consulted can be found in Appendix 4.

Overall views on menu labelling

Overall, the findings from the six chains consulted are consistent with the findings from the key informant interviews with nine other chains (Mah, Thomas, & Thang, 2013). Most are providing comprehensive nutrition information on their website and on site upon request because customers are interested in it, but they do not want to put information on the menu/menu board unless it is legislated, preferably by the federal government. Two operators (one who is providing comprehensive information and one not doing so) stressed that menu labelling, if legislated, should be a requirement for all restaurants, no matter the size or type of restaurant – there should be a level playing field. One explained that franchisees are similar to independents in many ways and should not be treated differently. *"I make five cents on the dollar... it's unfair to have a different set of rules [for chains franchise and independents].... The restaurant business is a tough one and you have to go into it being realistic, and play by the rules.... smaller 'mom & pops' don't play by the rules [and are treated with more latitude than the chains]."* This operator added that legislation will be futile unless it is well-enforced and there are substantial fines for non-compliance for all restaurants.

Four chains indicated they did not want to be the first out the door to provide nutrition information on the menu. As one said, *"If it's for everyone, everyone will be on the same playing field... I welcome it.. I don't want to be one of the first ones."* Two of these chains indicated that they have taken leadership in the past in doing the right thing, and it has cost them.

Two chain/franchise operators are participating in CRFA's voluntary program. One of these is now participating in the Informed Dining Program in BC because *"it sounded good and it was the right thing to do."* Both are providing the information via a poster and/or pamphlet on site, though one operator said they would be willing to consider making a handout available to customers.

Three of the four operators who are providing comprehensive nutrition information indicated that they are committed to creating healthy options for their customers and have made changes to their menu to provide more healthy choices either as a result of seeing the nutritional information or (perceptions of) customer demand. Interestingly, one chain indicated that they considered increasing portion sizes based on customer requests, but after seeing the nutritional information for the increased portions, they decided against it. This same chain provides calorie & total fat information on the menu board for selected items on a rotating basis.

One chain began posting calories on their menu boards in their USA locations in 2010, and this fall began calorie labelling in Canada for most menu items, excluding their baked goods and some other side

options. They report that calorie posting has created a win-win situation. Their customers appreciate the transparency which, in turn, increases brand loyalty. It has not had a negative impact on their bottom line; although they have noticed a drop in sales of some menu items, they have seen increased sales of healthier options. *"If the customer loves you for more reasons [i.e., more menu items], that's a win on our end."* This chain indicated that they would be open to considering participating in the pilot which would involve including sodium values. Their main concern was cluttering the menu and slowing down the ordering process by providing more information for the customer to consider.

The two operators who are not providing nutrition information to their customers have invested in analyzing their menus. One operator held the position that consumers have a right to know and that they would happily comply if it became the law. He added that legislation should apply to all restaurants, not just larger chains/franchises, and it should be well-enforced for all restaurants. His main concern with making nutrition information available is that it would be appropriated by other restaurants that have replicated their menu. He did not believe, however, that menu labelling would have an impact on consumer menu choice.

The other operator analyzed her menu to prepare for eventual menu labelling legislation. She has used the information to make recipe changes but is not prepared to put the information on the menu, unless others operators do the same. Her preference is for a national menu labelling approach. This person also added that consumers have to take responsibility for healthy eating and the government has to take responsibility for regulating sodium levels in the food supply. She would like to see Toronto Public Health address this issue, and support restaurants to identify lower sodium options.

Benefits of menu labelling

Three chains indicated that consumers would benefit from menu labelling. As one said, *"Consumers have a right to know and have a choice."* Two chains explained that menu labelling would be consistent with their brand which is "fresh and healthy options" and transparency. One explained that transparency results in trust and brand loyalty, so it is a way of boosting business. Like most of the independents, three of these chains have "healthy or fresh food" as part of their brand. Another chain indicated that he would consider participating in the pilot project if participation could elevate the status of his restaurant.

Drawbacks of menu labelling

Like independents, the main concern for chains/franchises of menu labelling was the potential negative impact on their revenue. The factors mentioned by at least three chains that would affect their bottom line were reduced sales of less-healthy items, the cost of participating in menu labelling (i.e., conducting nutritional analysis and changing the menu boards), visual clutter interrupting sales, and practical challenges of displaying nutrition information on the menu board.

One chain explained that they "shine" right now in terms of the amount of calories and fat in their foods and do not want to take the risk of tarnishing their brand by adding sodium content information on the menu board. One operator estimated the cost of menu labelling would be about \$10-\$15,000 per franchisee (including the software and staff training costs) which would put some out of business. As pointed out by some independents, a couple of operators spoke of their low profit margins. One said, *"I already do great things for my customers... providing the best at reduced cost... prices should be set 20-30% higher to reflect the quality."* In discussion of the calorie labelling legislation in the USA, two operators responded that we cannot compare Canada to the US. One explained that there is a lower frequency of eating out among Canadians so restaurants in Canada operate with lower profit margins.

Adding nutritional information to the menu board was perceived as a practical challenge but also one that could affect sales. One chain that includes photos of the food on their menu board said that the composition of their menu board is their sales tool, and more information on it would be "*interrupting our sales.... Aesthetics is important.*" Three operators indicated that it would be easier to display nutritional information on the menu board with LED screens, and one of these operators added that putting the nutrition menu on a computerized tablet (e.g., an iPad), would also make it easier.

Another practical challenge of menu labelling mentioned by a couple of operators was providing nutrition information for all the possible combinations that a customer could create at the time of ordering.

Other challenges of menu labelling identified by one or two operators included:

- being challenged in the media for providing inaccurate information (i.e. if an independent laboratory analysis showed a discrepancy in the nutrition values);
- service disruption due to customers taking longer to order from a menu that contains nutrition information;
- misappropriation of chains' nutritional information by independents who are replicating chain menu items; and
- restrictions posed by management of food courts, where many chains operate, in terms of menu board design and colour selection.

Views on key features of the proposed pilot project

Although the chains focused primarily on their views of menu labelling, in general, there were some comments on the features of the proposed pilot project.

Key nutrient values (calorie, sodium, and fat) for standard items on the menu

As discussed above, most chains are providing nutrition information upon request and are reluctant to participate in providing nutritional information on the menu/menu board unless it is a requirement. When asked to comment on the SmartMenu from Tacoma-Pierce County (which includes calorie, sodium, fat, and carbohydrate values under each menu item) and a sample Nutrition Menu from B.C.'s Informed Dining program (which includes values for calories plus all 13 nutrients found on a Nutrition Facts table), there were mixed reactions. Three chains believed the brochure provides too much information and therefore it is too confusing for the customer. One of these operators believes that the Informed Dining brochure with comprehensive information would create huge operational challenges, primarily slowing down service considerably and he would not be in favour of it. A couple of operators believed the Informed Dining menu is preferable given the large number of menu options and menu item customization that is available in chains like their own.

Nutritional analysis via computer software

Five chains used computer software to conduct their nutritional analysis and some of these also used laboratory analysis for some components of their menu. One had only used laboratory analysis. Although operators did not express any concern with the accuracy of the nutrition information they currently provide, three chains did express concerns with presenting computer derived information on the menu due to the risk of a media outlet testing their menu items in the laboratory which could yield different, and ostensibly more accurate results.

Restaurant recognition

Three chains indicated that promotion of the chains participating in the pilot would be beneficial, and it would contribute to their decision to participate. One chain said that restaurant promotion coupled with recruitment of higher profile restaurant chains would also act as a motivator as it could help elevate the status of his business; whereas the other two chains would feel more comfortable participating if they knew other similar chains were also participating.

Supports required to participate in the pilot project

Four chains suggested they would need to deliberate further on the advantages of participating in the pilot, and two clearly indicated they would not be interested in participating. Besides restaurant promotion or recognition for participating, the other support that a couple of chains said would motivate them to participate was financial support to offset the cost of nutritional analysis and/or producing new menu boards.

Suggestions for pilot project recruitment

Three chains offered suggestions on who should be included in the pilot. One operator indicated that it should include a range of chains, from small to large corporate chains, and from low to high end restaurants, as well as prominent chains. Another indicated that menu labelling is more suited to sit-down restaurants with a standard menu, such as family style restaurants. Yet another underscored the challenges independents would face in doing menu labelling and suggested focusing on restaurants with at least 3-5 locations which would more likely have the financial resources and standardized recipes which are required for nutritional analysis. Another chain indicated that they have two full-time staff allocated to nutritional analysis and agreed with TPH's proposal to provide support to independents to carry out this task.

Restaurant Industry Associations

Restaurant industry associations are critical stakeholders in the menu labelling discussion as they represent thousands of foodservice establishments and have been active in multiple arenas on the issue of nutrition information disclosure in the eating out environment. Over the past two years, TPH consulted with the national restaurant association and two provincial restaurant associations on their views on menu labelling and their thoughts on how to recruit member restaurants to participate in a survey or interviews about menu labelling. More recently, a national and a provincial association were consulted about the proposed menu labelling pilot project. For the recent consultations, the associations were sent an overview of the proposed pilot project (See appendix 1).

Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association (CRFA)

The CRFA represents over 30,000 the foodservice industry, including restaurants, bars, cafeterias, coffee shops, and contract and social caterers, as well as food suppliers as associate members. Their mission is to create an environment to help their members in every community grow and prosper through advocacy, research, member savings, and industry events.

The CRFA was consulted in September 2012. The CRFA shared their market research on the importance of the restaurant industry to the Canadian economy and their public survey on eating out behaviour

among Canadians, which, they indicated supports their position against menu labelling. They maintain that providing comprehensive nutrition information in various other formats is sufficient. They highlighted the following key points as arguments against menu labelling:

- Canadians are not eating out very often; only 1 of 10 meals is eaten out.
- For most Canadians, eating out is an indulgence and so nutrition information is not a major consideration but those who want nutrition information when eating out will seek it out.
- Providing consumers with comprehensive nutrition information consistent with what is provided on pre-packaged goods enables them to make a truly informed choice better than providing information on only a few nutrients on the menu.

The CRFA was consulted by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Task Group on Nutrition Information Provision in Restaurants and recommended that the federal government adopt Informed Dining as the model for a national program. Given the federal government's decision in the fall of 2012 not to proceed with a national program at this point, the CRFA has decided to endorse Informed Dining and replace their current voluntary program with Informed Dining, with the additional measure of requiring the information be available at the point of purchase. They indicated that they received strong support from the chains represented on their board of directors.

They plan to roll out Informed Dining in two phases. The first phase is focused on national chains that have at least one restaurant in British Columbia (BC). These chains will sign a licensing agreement with the BC government for both their BC restaurants and their restaurants outside of BC. The second phase is focused on chains that operate in multiple jurisdictions but do not have a restaurant in B.C. They will sign a licensing agreement with the CRFA. As the CRFA does not have the resources to administer the Informed Dining program, they are seeking partnerships with provincial governments, including the Ontario government.

Despite their preference to working with provincial governments to support implementation of the Informed Dining approach, they would be interested in collaborating with TPH/City of Toronto to implement Informed Dining in Toronto restaurants as an interim or permanent step.

Ontario Restaurant Hotel Motel Association (ORHMA)

ORHMA is the largest provincial hospitality association in Canada with over 4,000 members, representing more than 11,000 establishments across Ontario. ORHMA represents the industry's interests at both the provincial and municipal levels of government. Its mission is to foster a positive business climate for Ontario's hospitality industry, while providing value-added services to its members.

ORHMA was consulted in August 2011 about the development of the online survey of independent restaurants and menu labelling, in general, and again in November 2012 about the pilot project. Their position has been consistent and is summarized in a formal statement ORHMA sent to TPH in March 2012. This document indicates that ORHMA supports the following:

- Consumers should have access to consistent nutrition information wherever they buy food – what they get in restaurants should be consistent with the information provided for packaged foods available in grocery stores, movie theatres and convenience stores.
- Content of information provided needs to be carefully considered – calories or sodium alone (or any other information on its own) do not provide adequate nutrition information required for customers to make a fully informed decision and would not be consistent with the information provided on packaged goods in grocery stores and elsewhere.

- The posting of calories on menus and menu boards has not been shown to conclusively prove an effect on behaviour or buying habits.
- Many chains already provide nutrition information both in store and online. The format in which the nutrition information is provided is best determined based on customer need and the individual business model, whether QSR or a more formal sit down establishment.
- Menu board labelling is impracticable as it is often already provided in a variety of formats as a service to customers who wish to inform themselves and there are significant costs associated with doing so, not to mention that it is often not physically possible to get adequate nutrition information onto a restricted space such as a menu or menu board and it is not aesthetically appealing.

They indicated that they made a submission to the Provincial Healthy Kids Panel encouraging the Province to consider adopting an "Informed Dining Program" approach because it is a "transparent, one stop channel" that has potential to be a national standard.

Despite their reservations with menu labelling, they are interested in TPH's proposed pilot and would like to continue to work with TPH on further development of the pilot project and its evaluation.

Their main concerns about the pilot with independent restaurants and smaller chains revolve around cost, the focus on only calories and sodium, menu display feasibility, and the potential for competing extra-jurisdictional standards (i.e., provincial or federal legislation). They also suggested that the pilot allow flexibility in how and what nutritional information is provided; for example, restaurants could be given the choice to provide comprehensive information via a nutrition menu as with the B.C. Informed Dining Program.

They identified various factors that would enable independent restaurants and small chains to participate in the pilot, including providing subsidies or covering the full cost of participation, developing promotional materials highlighting the benefits of menu labelling, allowing for some flexibility, and keeping the program simple.

Ontario Chinese Restaurant Association (OCRA)

The OCRA is a non-profit organization with branches in Toronto, Ottawa, and Kitchener. They were consulted in September 2011, primarily about the development of the online survey for independent restaurants, but their views on menu labelling were also solicited.

OCRA indicated that in order to gain support for menu labelling among their restaurant members, it would be necessary to demonstrate with concrete information why menu labelling would be worth the investment. The main challenges of implementing menu labelling in restaurants specializing in Chinese cuisine were the extensive menus of many of these restaurants, which would be costly to analyze, and ensuring consistency between different chefs/food handlers in restaurants with a large staff team. To address these issues, they suggested focusing on take-out menus only, which are generally shorter and often prepared by a smaller staff team/one chef or analyzing only the "top 10" menu items. They also indicated the need for training for the food handlers, chefs, as well as owners to support participation in menu labelling, and for ways to address language barriers.

Summary

Overall, the consultations revealed that most in the restaurant industry recognize that providing nutrition information is the current trend and believe menu labelling is on the horizon. The CRFA and ORHMA have been active in shaping how restaurants provide this service to their customers, and stand firmly against menu labelling as the way of providing this service. Both organizations are in favour of restaurants providing comprehensive nutrition information to their customers in the format that they choose.

The views of most chains/franchises consulted about the pilot project are fairly consistent with those of the restaurant associations. Most have analyzed their menus and have made comprehensive nutrition information available on their web site or on their premises, upon request. They are reluctant to provide key nutrient information on the menu unless all restaurants are legislated to do so. Chains/franchises cited both practical challenges of providing nutrition information on the menu/menu board as well as the cost of menu labelling, primarily the loss of revenue from reduced sales of less healthy items. They expressed only tentative interest in participating in a pilot that would have them be first out of the gate with menu labelling.

In contrast, independently owned/operated restaurants see menu labelling as an opportunity to be industry leaders and take advantage of a current trend, create a competitive advantage against chains, and promote the healthfulness of their menus. Most would like to participate in the TPH menu labelling pilot project, as currently proposed, as long as there are supports in place to offset the nutritional analysis costs. These operators saw the restaurant recognition component as the return on their investment in menu labelling and believed it could help boost business.

References

Mah, Catherine, Thomas, Andrew, & Thang, Helen of the Food Policy Research Initiative. (June 2013). *Exploring Nutrition Information When Eating Out in Toronto: In-Depth Interviews, Toronto Chain and Franchise Restaurants*. Prepared for Toronto Public Health.

Toronto Public Health. What's on the Menu: Making Key Nutrition Information Readily Available in Restaurants. Toronto, Ontario. April 2013.

Appendix 1: Overview of the Proposed TPH Menu Labelling Pilot Project for Toronto Restaurants

Goal of Menu Labelling

- To provide consumers with nutrition information at point of purchase (e.g., on the menu/menu board) to help them to make food choices when eating out.

Reasons for Menu Labelling

- People are eating out more often than ever before so it is important that they have information to help them make healthier food choices, just like they have when grocery shopping.
- Toronto residents want to have nutrition information when eating out.
- There may be legislation mandating menu labelling in the future.

Goals of Pilot Project

- To test the feasibility of providing nutrition information to customers on an ongoing basis.

Proposed Pilot Project Elements

- **Restaurants:** about 10-20 independently owned/operated restaurants and about 2-5 large chains, including quick service and sit-down establishments
- **Nutrients of focus:** calories, sodium, and fat
- **Menu items to be analyzed:** all standard menu items, including drinks and desserts
- **Nutritional analysis:** Free use of computer software program, with support from TPH Dietitians
- **Restaurant recognition:** Public recognition of participating restaurants in various ways by TPH (e.g., web site, social media)
- **Healthy menu choices:** Various supports for enhancing healthy options on the menu (e.g., easy-to-use healthy cooking guides, annual workshop on healthy cooking)
- **Evaluation:** Different types of information will be collected before, during, and after to evaluate the project (e.g., interview with restaurants to find out what aspects of the program were most difficult/most helpful and ongoing supports needed to maintain the program; use customer comment card to assess customer satisfaction with menu labelling; tracking sales of menu items, etc.)
- **Expected start of Pilot:** Winter 2013-14

Complimentary Activity

Toronto Public Health will enhance public education about healthy eating

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see as the benefits of providing nutritional information to your customers?
2. Do you have the capacity to participate in the pilot project, as proposed? What aspects would be most challenging? What would help you to participate?
3. What suggestions do you have for the menu labelling pilot project that would make it easier or more attractive for independent restaurants to participate?
4. Are you interested in participating in the pilot project, which includes participating in the evaluation?
5. Would you be able to recommend any other restaurants that may be interested in participating?

Appendix 2: Restaurant Consultation Guide

Background Script

What we would like to hear from you today is your thoughts on providing nutritional information to your customers and your thoughts on the approach Toronto Public Health is considering for the pilot project.

First we just want to take a few minutes to tell you why TPH is interested in providing consumers with nutrition information when eating out, and the purpose of a pilot project with restaurants.

TPH's rationale for menu labelling

There are three main reasons that TPH wants to promote providing nutritional information to consumers in Toronto.

- The primary reason is that people are eating out more frequently than ever before and we want to ensure that Torontonians have the information they need to make choices about what they eat when eating out, just like they have when grocery shopping or buying some packaged goods.
- We also know from our recent survey of Torontonians, that they want to have nutrition information when eating out.
- Finally, there may be legislation mandating menu labelling in the future

To guide our planning, we surveyed independently owned or operated restaurants to hear what they thought about providing nutrition information to their customers, and we also interviewed 9 executives from large and small chain restaurants/franchises.

- From the survey of independent restaurants we found that 1 in 2 restaurants said that it would help attract customers, but many people also reported that it was not necessary to provide nutrition information to their customers and identified challenges in doing so (primarily cost & time).
- Chain restaurants indicated that they would prefer a national approach, chains are already providing comprehensive information, and that smaller chains may be more able to participate as they have more flexibility.
- With this round of consultation, we would like to discuss in more detail your thoughts on providing nutritional information to customers and on the feasibility study or pilot project that we are planning.

Questions

Current Practice

1. Do you currently provide any nutritional information to your customers?
 - a. *If yes:* What information do you provide? *If no, go to Q. 2.*
 - b. In what format is it provided?

- c. Is it available at the point of purchase?
2. Have you ever considered providing nutritional information to your customers?
 - a. What has stopped you from doing so?
3. What do you see as the benefits of providing nutritional information? (*probe*: for independent restaurants/chains/franchises, in general? for your restaurant? for your customers?)

For chains/franchises

 - a. Do you think that providing customers with nutritional information affects their decision to order or eat at your chain/franchise?
 - b. Have you assessed how much the nutrition information is being used (e.g., tracking downloads, visits to the site)?

Capacity to Participate

(Review parameters of project in Overview that was sent in advance)

Here is an example of what a menu could look like with a display of 4 nutrient values. This menu is from a restaurant that participated in a menu labelling program for independent restaurants in the Tacoma region in Washington State. The menu displays information on 4 nutrients – calories, sodium, fat and carbohydrates. *Show Tacoma Menu samples.*

4. What are the drawbacks/challenges associated with this type of menu labelling?
5. What type of independent restaurants/chains/franchises would be most suited to participating in this pilot?
6. Do you have the capacity to participate in the pilot project, as proposed?
 - a. What aspects would be most challenging?
 - b. What would help you to participate?

Probes primarily for independent restaurants:

- Standardizing your recipes/writing down your recipes in a way that will enable analysis?
- Having the time to do the nutritional analysis online? Being able to designate a person to do it?
- Menu layout and design issues (if applicable)? Would it be necessary or useful for TPH to provide templates to use for menu design and layout? What process have you used to redesign your menu in the past? Do you do it in-house or send it out?
- Cost of printing new menus? When you need to re-print or print more menus, do you do it in-house or send it out?
- Can you see yourself able to take time to participate in the evaluation which could involve the following: at least one interview at the end of the pilot to discuss implementation; distributing comment cards to customers; a brief survey of restaurant staff; a time-limited customer survey (before enter/after leave the restaurant; tracking

sales of menu items with nutrition information – do you have the system in place to track? If not, TPH could develop a template to use.

- Adding new standard menu items after the pilot has been implemented or completed?
7. What suggestions do you have for the menu labelling pilot project that would make it easier or more attractive for independents/chains/franchises to participate?
 8. Based on what you know about the program at this point, are you still interested in participating in the pilot project, which includes participating in the evaluation?
 9. Would you be able to recommend any other restaurants that may be interested in participating?

Appendix 3: Description of Restaurant Participants

	Independently-owned/operated Restaurants	Chains/Franchises
Region of the city	3 – East 8 – West 3 – North 3 – South	All chains have locations throughout the city
Type of Restaurant	9 – Sit-Down 4 – Sit-Down/Quick Service	2 – Sit-Down 3 – Quick Service/Sit-Down 1 – Quick Service
Number of locations in Toronto	11 – 1 location 2 – 2-4 locations	3 – 2-5 locations 2 – 6-10 locations 1 – 10+ locations
Cuisine Type	1 – Asian 1 – Café 1 – Continental 2 – Mediterranean 3 – Multiple cuisines 1 – Pub 3 – South Asian 1 – Vegetarian	1 – Café/Bakery 1 – Greek 1 – Multiple cuisines 1 – Pizza 1 – Pub 1 – South Asian
Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner Oriented	6 – B/L/D 1 – B/L 1 – L 5 – L/D	1 – B/L 4 – L/D 1 – B/L/D

Appendix 4: Restaurant Chain Participants

Six chains were consulted for this report. Five chains gave Toronto Public Health permission to disclose their identity. They include the following:

- Imago Restaurants
- Cora's Breakfast
- Mr. Greek
- Panera Bread
- Teriyaki Experience.