

POLICY IN PRACTICE

Healthy Public Food Procurement in Quezon City, Philippines

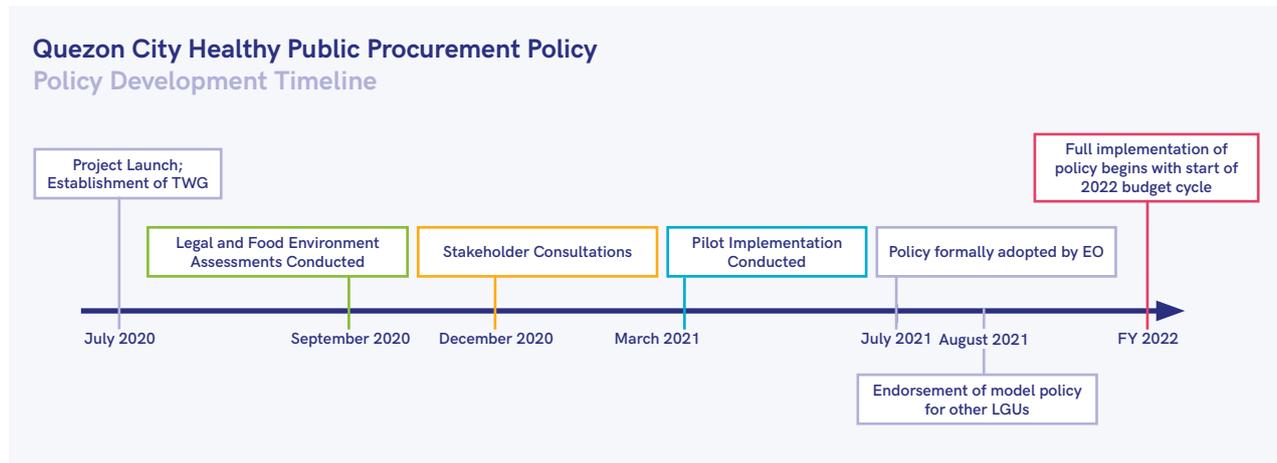
Agenda

In the Philippines, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) account for 69% of all deaths, with cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) being the leading cause of death for Filipinos, resulting in more than 200,000 deaths every year.

About 81,000 of these deaths are attributed to dietary risk factors. With 2.9 million people, Quezon City (QC) is the most populous city in the Philippines. It is committed to combatting NCDs, as part of the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and Partnership for Healthy Cities. To promote a healthy and sustainable diet, the city initiated the development of a healthy food procurement policy in 2020, with two aims: First, to develop and pilot a model healthy public food procurement policy for QC; and second, to secure a national endorsement of the policy that prompts local government units (LGUs) to implement it nationwide and use the model policy as the basis of a national policy.



Photo by Ms. Roselle Cantor of the Quezon City Social Services Development Department at the Molave Youth Home



SECTION I. POLICY PREPARATION

Establish a Workgroup

In July 2020, the Quezon City (QC) government formally issued a resolution to establish the QC Healthy Public Food Procurement Technical Working Group (TWG), tasked with creating a Healthy Public Food Procurement Policy and overseeing all aspects of the policy cycle, including policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The resolution identified the following city government offices and departments as members of the TWG and outlined roles and responsibilities.

Environmental Protection and Waste Management Department (EPWMD):

- Appointed as the main point-of-contact; spearheaded efforts to convene the TWG and provided administrative support.

The Office of the City Administrator (OCA):

- Oversaw the development of and advocacy for the policy; provided key policy endorsement for the QC Mayor and Executive Committee.

The City General Procurement Department (PD):

- Provided technical advice on incorporating the policy in the city government's procurement process.
- Trained QC offices and departments to prepare project procurement and management plans that align with the policy.

The City Health Department (CHD):

- Provided technical expertise on the development, implementation and communication of the nutrition standards within the policy and compliance assessment tools.
- Led trainings for end-users and food suppliers; conducted monitoring and evaluation during pilot implementation.

The City Budget Department (CBD):

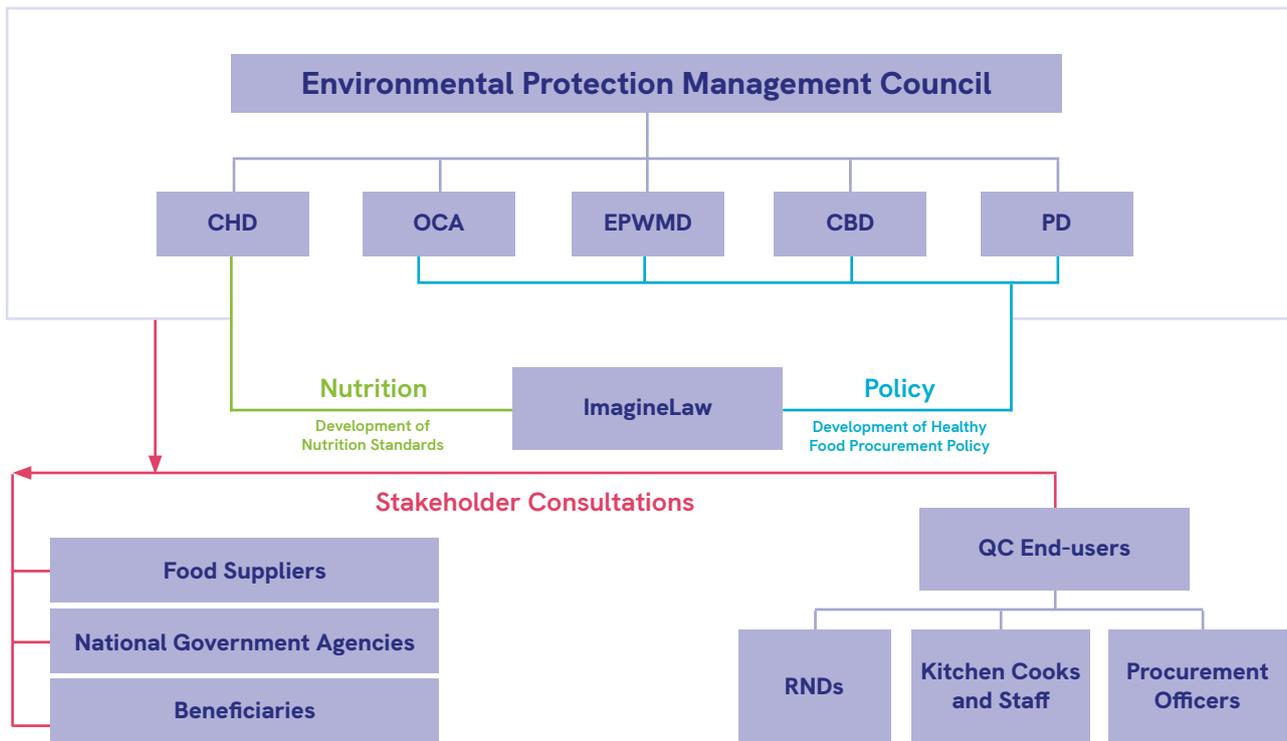
- Provided technical assistance on the process for submitting and approving Project Procurement Management Plans (PPMPs), which identify items to be procured by each office and department during the upcoming fiscal year, in accordance with the city's budget allocation.

Additional members and stakeholders:

ImagineLaw: The QC government resolution also formalized the collaboration between the QC government and ImagineLaw, a non-profit public interest law organization. The TWG worked closely with ImagineLaw, which provided technical assistance to the QC government on all aspects of the project, including: conducting research (legal and food environment assessments), writing the first draft of the nutrition standards, developing and organizing workshops and training sessions for QC end-users and providing technical assistance in drafting policy monitoring instruments. The ImagineLaw team consisted of a project manager, nutritionist and a policy associate. The project manager and policy associate were lawyers working on policy development and advocacy, while the registered registered nutritionist-dietitian (RND) provided technical support for the nutrition components of the project.

QC End-users are the offices and departments of the QC government that procure food for their official activities and functions. This includes government employees, procurement officers, kitchen cooks and staff RNDs.

Fig. 1 Establishing the Policy: Roles, Responsibilities and Workflow of the Technical Working Group



Building Evidence through Assessments

A *legal assessment* was conducted by ImagineLaw, which comprised 1) a review of policies related to procurement such as national and subnational legislation, administrative issuances, project procurement plans, and bids and awards documents available at the QC government website; 2) reviews of contracts between suppliers and end-users to check for technical specifications on nutrition, if any; and, 3) consultations with QC departments and offices on current procurement policies and processes.

The legal assessment confirmed there were no existing nutritional requirements for government-procured food. It also revealed that the government procurement law Republic Act (RA) No. 9184 allows procuring entities, such as the city government, to add technical specifications (including nutrition standards) for the purchase of specific types of goods, such as food. However, food establishments and other vendors that rent public spaces on government property are outside the scope of the law. Food donations are not included within the bounds of the procurement law either. Assessments are being conducted to determine potential policy pathways for applying the nutrition standards in the public food environments not covered by RA 9184.

A *food environment assessment* was also conducted, consisting of a recipe and meal analysis, market and supplier scan and a price scan. The recipe and meal analysis evaluated ingredients used, cooking methods applied and the proportion, balance and variety of food commonly served. It showed that some QC government offices already observe good nutrition practices in their meal preparation, which can be improved and made more consistent through a healthy public food procurement policy. The market and supplier scan revealed that despite QC’s status as a highly urbanized city (HUC), nutritious food was available and accessible through large public markets and community urban farms, which are slowly growing as a source of fresh food. The price scan assessed the affordability of healthy and nutritious food in QC, showing that healthy food options were affordable in the city, and that there are more than 10 large markets, many small community markets and at least 51 restaurants ready to supply healthy food, should demand increase.

SECTION II. POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Creation of the Nutrition Standards and Drafting the Policy

The nutrition standards were developed using national dietary guidelines, such as the Nutritional Guidelines for Filipinos, and global guidelines, such as the World Health Organization's Five Keys to a Healthy Diet. These draft nutrition standards were reviewed by the City Health Department (CHD) and the National Nutrition Council (NNC) — the country's highest policymaking body on nutrition. The review helped to refine the standards and uncover potential challenges or gaps in coverage, such as ensuring food safety with respect to delivery, storage and the serving of fresh food, and the inclusion of fortified food products and iodized salt.

Alongside these consultations, the nutrition standards were reviewed by QC end-users. This extensive and highly iterative process was critical to ensure that the nutrition standards were locally appropriate, feasible and sustainable for implementation. User feedback from city department heads, procurement officers and field officers was also incorporated into the initial policy draft. Subsequent drafts of the policy were reviewed by end-users and key policymakers, including the Procurement Department, Health Department and Social Services Development Department, to confirm their institutional mandates, technical capacity, resources and limitations. These consultations helped flesh out the technical aspects of the policy through relationship-building and collaboration with end-users of the policy.

The final draft was presented to the QC government, the NNC and the Department of the Interior and Local Government to ensure alignment with national goals and initiate opportunities to scale the policy nationwide.

Pilot Implementation

ImagineLaw and CHD conducted a pilot implementation of the QC Nutrition Standards in three large public hospitals, a youth reception and action center and a rehabilitation center. A pilot implementation was conducted before the policy was enacted to assess the policy's feasibility and prepare end-users for its full implementation. Trainings on how to incorporate the nutrition standards into bidding documents, PPMPs and cycle menus were provided for city government staff. In addition, kitchen cooks and staff, registered nutritionist-dietitian (RNDs) and food suppliers were trained on the Nutrition Standards and healthy meal planning and preparation. Similarly, City Council staff members were trained on incorporating the Nutrition Standards into their COVID-19 and disaster response feeding programs.

Although the pilot implementation was limited to the preparation of food already procured because the budget for the year had been set, the monitoring and evaluation framework for full implementation of the policy was employed. With this tool, QC sought to assess end-users' compliance with the nutrition standards, determine the acceptability of compliant meals and snacks and identify changes needed in the government procurement process.

The results showed that the Nutrition Standards were feasible, paving the way for the policy with these nutrition standards to be formally included in the following year's budget call guidelines. The pilot implementation was a very useful, low-risk method to test a policy and make necessary adjustments prior to full implementation.

On July 23, 2021, QC Mayor Josefina Belmonte signed Executive Order (EO) No. 16, series of 2021 formalizing the QC Healthy Public Food Procurement Policy. The policy requires all food procured by the QC Government and served at government-run institutions and events under RA 9184 to comply with the QC Nutrition Standards. This includes food provided at meetings, trainings and conferences, as well as in-patient meals served at hospitals and snacks provided at child development centers. Only food bought with government funds is covered by the policy. Food sold by canteens on government premises, or third-party vendors in and around government property, is not covered by the policy. EO No. 16, s. 2021 is the first healthy public food procurement policy in the Philippines.

SECTION III. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

To ensure successful uptake of the QC Healthy Public Food Procurement Policy, a series of resources were developed to educate stakeholders about its contents.

Promotion and Communication

The QC government issued a press release that was picked up by the People’s Television Network (PTV4) and reposted by other news sites and blogs. Internally, memorandums were issued to all QC offices and departments, including one from the City Budget Department, notifying staff of the requirement to incorporate the new nutrition guidelines for food procurement in PPMPs.



Quote cards from the Mayor and Vice Mayor were posted on the city’s social media platforms. The Mayor’s quote highlighted the support and political will of the city towards enacting and implementing the policy.

Facebook groups on “Healthy Public Food Procurement” were created for QC government end-users and food suppliers, which enabled members to share healthy meal planning and preparation tips, photos and news on healthy food procurement, and to connect with urban farmers and local suppliers of whole-food ingredients.

Implementation Support Materials

Healthy Food Procurement Policy Video: A short, animated video created by ImagineLaw was developed to introduce the policy to end-users, food suppliers and the general public. The video includes a description of what the policy aims to do, and the general key guidelines and nutrition standards included in the policy. The video is intended to be aired on city-owned billboards, buses, government offices and other public spaces.

Healthy Meal Preparation Guide (Cookbook and Directory): A tool for end-users in preparing their procurement plans and cycle menus. It contains sample cycle menus compliant with the Nutrition Standards and tips on how to make meals and snacks healthier based on ingredients and preparation techniques. It also contains a directory of community urban farms in QC to help connect end-users to suppliers of healthy whole foods. The guide will regularly be updated to include new recipes and additional food suppliers that offer foods meeting the Nutrition Standards.

Healthy Meal Preparation Training Videos: Two 10-minute videos were created to help meal preparation staff in comply with the Nutrition Standards. The videos demonstrate how to make traditional meals and snacks healthier and provide guidance on how to comply with the Nutrition Standards. The video will be available for use by the city's food preparation staff and food suppliers.

Trainings

The city will conduct trainings for all end-users before full implementation begins. They will focus on the preparation of PMPs and other bidding documents in accordance with the Nutrition Standards, and healthy meal planning and preparation. Trainings on healthy meal preparation will also be conducted with food suppliers who are interested in bidding for food procurement projects.

SECTION IV. MONITORING, ENFORCEMENT AND EVALUATION

The monitoring and evaluation tools from the pilot implementation will be used by all QC government departments. The policy mandates a review to identify policy and implementation gaps every six months. These tools will help QC evaluate the policy and make any necessary modifications.

Monitoring the Policy

A Nutrition Standards Scorecard was created to monitor and evaluate compliance by food suppliers with the policy. This included two separate forms: one for evaluating prepackaged food and another to assess standard meals and snacks directly prepared and served by caterers. These scorecards will be used by members of the Bids and Awards Committee's Technical Working Group who are RNDs, to evaluate prepackaged and catered food during the post-qualification phase of food procurement. The post-qualification assessment may be conducted through site inspections, food sampling and/or other evaluation activities during post-qualification of winning bidders for food contracts

Evaluation

The CHD conducted field inspections in government facilities to check institutions' use of the Nutrition Standards Scorecard as part of the pilot implementation and collected baseline data for the subsequent evaluation. The baseline data will measure compliance of the city's end-users during full implementation, and improvements in health and nutrition outcomes.

SCALING UP NATIONWIDE

Endorsement by Other LGUs

The national government, through the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and Department of Health (DOH), has committed to scale up healthy public food procurement nationwide by endorsing QC's policy as a model for other LGUs to implement.

National Policy

The development of a national healthy food procurement policy that encompasses national government agencies' procurement will build upon the QC policy work. It will follow a similar process that involves many stakeholders, including government agencies from the health, agriculture and social services sectors, and private entities, such as farmers and fisherfolk. However, stakeholders from the food industry will not be involved in scope or policy decisions to avoid conflict of interest.

Key Lessons Learned

These key lessons learned from ImagineLaw's efforts to work with government agencies to implement a healthy public food procurement policy in Quezon City can be used to guide other jurisdictions' efforts to develop and promote healthy food procurement policies.

Build a strong evidence-base. Conduct in-depth assessments of both the legal and food environments to understand the current structure and uncover opportunities for designing a strong healthy food procurement policy. These assessments form an evidence-base and act as a guidepost to inform policy design and advocacy strategy.

Engage and involve as many stakeholders as possible. Each stakeholder brings a unique perspective from their area of expertise (e.g., policymakers, food suppliers, beneficiaries, kitchen cooks and staff) that makes the policy better by providing insight early on regarding potential challenges or missed opportunities. Strong shows of support from external stakeholders — such as food suppliers and national government agencies — boosted the city government's confidence in enacting the policy. Importantly, although food suppliers were engaged stakeholders, the final Nutrition Standards and policy were developed free of industry influence.

Ensure a clear assignment of roles and responsibilities. The roles and responsibilities of each city government agency involved in creating the policy were clearly delineated in the QC resolution for TWG. This promoted efficiency and harmony by avoiding duplication of effort and redundancies, and ensured that only the relevant agencies were involved at each step of policy development.

Engage senior leadership. Buy-in from senior government officials overseeing policy at the bureau or division level ensured high-level decision-making and that subordinate offices cooperated in the policy development process.

Build ownership among government partners. Regular and open engagement from the initial stages of the policy down to enactment, implementation and monitoring is key to building ownership and commitment among institutional partners. Having institutional partners support and invest time and resources in policy development and advocacy throughout the process helped streamline policy adoption and ensure sustainability of the policy over time.