

2021

INCREASING ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD IN SCHOOLS

LIMA, PERU



World Health
Organization



Globally, the prevalence of overweight and obesity among children is rising, and more than two thirds of overweight children now live in low-and middle-income countries (LMICs).¹ School food and nutrition policies that create a healthier food environment are one avenue to address this challenge.

At the national level, Peru has historically suffered from high rates of child obesity. In 2010, only 9.3% of school children had eaten fruit and vegetables 5 times a day in the previous month.² In 2013 the Peruvian government passed a national law to improve children’s access to healthy food – Law 30021, “Ley de Promoción de la Alimentación Saludable para Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes” – and a number of national programs were in place to support this commitment. However, there remained room for action at the local level.

In 2021, the Metropolitan Municipality of Lima’s local congress unanimously passed a groundbreaking law to improve access to healthier food for children locally. The new law was developed through a participatory process with the Healthy Eating Environments Taskforce, a group of civil society organizations, in collaboration with the Metropolitan Commission of Public Health and Social Development of the Municipality of Lima.

The ordinance encourages—and in many cases requires—healthy food environments in both schools and restaurants. Schools may now only provide healthy foods and drinks to students on their premises, including providing access to fresh drinking water for all students. Additionally, unhealthy foods may not be sold or marketed within 200 meters of schools. Together these measures are designed to guarantee a healthy food environment for students, enabling them to choose healthier options and protecting them from marketing of unhealthy foods. The new law also targets children and adolescents and was born through a participatory process with civil society organizations known as the Healthy Eating Environments Taskforce, working with the Metropolitan Commission of Public Health and Social Development of the Municipality of Lima.

Under the same ordinance, local restaurants need to abide by new practices aimed at reducing salt and sugar intake. An incentivization program called “Lima Come Sano” (“Lima Eats Healthy”) will promote restaurants that offer at least 20% of healthy foods on their menus and prominently display the calorie count of prepared foods, in order to help

¹ World Health Organization, *Assessing the existing evidence base on school food and nutrition policies: a scoping review*, 2021 [<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240025646>]

² Pan American Health Organization, *Ley de promoción de la alimentación saludable para niños, niñas y adolescentes. Experiencia de Perú*, 2021 [<https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/54861/OPSPER210004-spa.pdf>]

consumers make more informed choices. All restaurants will be required to display a sign with the campaign slogan, “Less salt, less sugar, more life,” and to provide saltshakers and condiments only upon request.

This latter policy was directly inspired by a similar one adopted in 2018 by the city of Montevideo, also supported by the [Partnership for Healthy Cities](#). Through the Partnership network, Lima was able to participate in an ongoing conversation about healthy food environments with other cities in Latin America. These exchanges allowed successful strategies and experiences to be shared between public health leaders in Quito, Ecuador; Montevideo, Uruguay; and Bogotá and Cali in Colombia. They came at a time when cities from the region have struggled with a dual nutritional challenge of high obesity rates and rising rates of food insecurity, which had increased across the region as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of Lima’s new policy, the city is providing increased protection to thousands of schoolchildren and restaurant diners. The city’s work complements national efforts to improve healthy diets for children by guaranteeing a healthy food environment at and around school. Through its new ordinance, Lima has also highlighted the value of peer-to-peer exchanges between cities in supporting effective policy formation.



A healthy school meal in Lima. Photo credit: City of Lima/Vital Strategies