

Texas Health and Human Services Commission
Legislative Report
House Bill 3401

Background

H.B. 3401, 83rd Legislature, Regular Session, 2013, required the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to work with community-based organizations to encourage individuals receiving benefits to access readily available and existing online information and programs, including information provided on HHSC's website, for the purpose of promoting healthy eating habits and a physically active lifestyle. H.B. 3401 directs HHSC to report to the Legislature, no later than January 1, 2015, on the use of nutrition and wellness education information provided on the HHSC website. The Legislative Report must include feedback from clients on the effectiveness of the information accessed and any available data on the number of individuals who accessed the information.

Eat Healthy Webpage Overview

In response to the requirements outlined in H.B. 3401, HHSC developed the Eat Healthy webpage, as part of the existing Your Texas Benefits website. The Eat Healthy webpage promotes healthy eating and a physically active lifestyle. The webpage provides: tips on meal planning; shopping for nutritious foods; saving money; healthy recipes; and links to other helpful resources.

HHSC provided community-based organizations, including Community Partners and non-profit organizations, with information on the Eat Healthy webpage and encouraged them to disseminate the information. Community Partners are faith and community-based organizations who partner with HHSC to provide access points and application assistance for clients applying for HHSC benefits and services. HHSC also promoted information about the Eat Healthy webpage through newsletters, conference calls, email, training events, community meetings, 2-1-1 system hold messages, the HHSC website and HHSC's Facebook page. In addition, HHSC encouraged other state agencies that work with community organizations to promote the Eat Healthy page on their websites.

Webpage Feedback

As required in H.B. 3401, the Eat Healthy webpage includes a link for users to submit feedback on the usefulness of the information on the site. HHSC received 165 completed surveys from March 24, 2014 through November 26, 2014. Overall, 92 percent of survey respondents found the Eat Healthy webpage helpful and 81 percent indicated they would likely make changes with their grocery purchases as result of the information provided on the website. When asked to select any option that applied, survey respondents indicated the following topics were helpful: tips for planning meals (62 percent), tips for shopping (58 percent), recipes (56 percent) and links to other sites (39 percent).

Through the survey process, HHSC asks for suggestions to improve the Eat Healthy webpage. Survey respondents made the following suggestions on how to improve the webpage contents:

- Food Selection and Preparation
 - Provide more recipes, including recipes with vegetables and fruits

- Include video demonstrations of recipe preparation
- Provide meal plans
- Provide pictures of recipes
- Include videos on topics such as selecting fruit and vegetables, and cooking methods
- Include information on specialized meal selection and preparation for different types of ethnicities, for senior citizens, for veterans, for vegetarians and to manage certain diseases such as diabetes
- Include information on making healthy choices when eating out
- Include links to coupons
- Provide forms for shopping lists and creating menus
- Include links to information on seasonal fruits and vegetables
- Ensure that food recommendations/information on the webpage is realistic for people receiving benefits (i.e. ingredients that are easily purchased)
- Provide more information on whole food/plant based meals/snacks
- Provide tips on maximizing limited benefits when grocery shopping
- Include information on how to read food labels
- Provide information on how to get kids to eat vegetables
- Exercise
 - Provide information on exercise classes, including low cost options
 - Provide information on exercise options specific to teenagers
 - Include more information on physical activities
- Local Resources
 - Include information on finding local producers and farmers markets including information on whether they accept of SNAP benefits
 - Provide listings of local SNAP-Ed classes
- Other
 - Provide better organized, more easily accessible information and better graphics
 - Provide program contact information
 - Provide food and freezer storage guidelines
 - Include information on correct portion sizes
 - Provide links to other health and food resources. Examples of other resources mentioned included school lunch and other meal programs such as Meals on Wheels
 - Include a “kids area” with games, coloring pages, stories, etc.
 - Make information available in print form for people who don’t have access to computers
 - Promote availability of Eat Healthy Webpage on social media

Data Results

As required by H.B. 3401, HHSC requested information about survey respondents. Respondents were asked if they currently receive or would like to receive SNAP or other benefits, if they work for a HHSC Community Partner Organization, or if none of the above options applied. Of the 165 surveys completed:

- 8 percent indicated they receive SNAP food benefits or TANF
- 7 percent indicated they don’t receive SNAP food benefits or TANF

- 34 percent indicated work for an HHSC Community Partner
- 6 percent don't currently receive benefits but are interested in applying
- 45 percent did not select from any of the provided options and did not provide additional personal information

Conclusion

HHSC has made improvements to the webpage including improving its accessibility on the YourTexasBenefits.org site. HHSC has also used Facebook to raise awareness about the Eat Healthy webpage. HHSC will continue to evaluate feedback to improve the webpage design and content for the goal of providing current, useful and easy-to-understand information about eating healthfully and increasing physical activity while living on a budget.