



## **Integrated Healthcare Association (IHA)**

### **Healthy Alternatives Vending Program**

#### **Program Overview**

In January 2005, the Integrated Healthcare Association (IHA) board passed a resolution to develop and promote a Healthy Alternatives food policy for vending machines at IHA member organizations. In the following two years, twenty IHA member organizations adopted the vending policy and began implementation, with several employers reporting success. At least 200,000 employees at 500 worksites across California already have access to healthier options in vending machines. Additionally, 6.5 million Kaiser Permanente members are now offered healthy options in vending machines in Kaiser facilities throughout the state.

The success of this program within the health care community in California prompted IHA to move the initiative into the private sector. The Institute of Medicine report released in September 2006, "Progress in Preventing Childhood Obesity: How do we Measure Up?" recognized that the obesity epidemic requires interventions at numerous levels. Recognizing that corporations as employers have an interest in a healthy workforce with healthy families, it urges employers to accept corporate responsibility and to promote employee wellness opportunities and benefits that include offering healthful food in vending machines. Having healthy foods available at the workplace is one of several required changes which could lead to better health by addressing the "obesity environment."

Corporations are major consumers of health care with increasing interest in the impact of obesity on their current and future workforce and their families. Therefore, we have urged employers to adopt the IHA Healthy Alternatives program. A target of capturing one million employees by the end of the year 2007 was established although our ability to track and measure results was limited. IHA continued to aggressively push to extend our influence beyond the healthcare industry and into industries, trade groups, and business associations who have a broad reach across diverse constituencies in California. Ultimately, through public relations efforts and high level endorsements and media attention, we aimed to achieve a measurable public awareness of healthy food alternatives, resulting in behavioral changes that halt the tide of obesity in children and adults.

IHA strives to combat the growing obesity epidemic by urging immediate, doable, relatively simple, and effective action in the business and healthcare sectors. The obesity crisis that is endangering us and our kids can be halted if we create environments that make it easy for parents, as well as children, to eat well. The IHA policy is aimed at creating environments at the workplace that make it easy to make healthy food choices. This means that as healthcare professionals and other employees learn to change their behavior and make healthy food choices, they will model positive behavioral changes for their patients and children. We can't turn the tide on childhood and adult obesity without a collaborative effort involving not only children, but also parents, communities, health care professionals, and business leaders.