

**Smart Meal™ Seal program**  
Colorado Physical Activity and Nutrition Program (COPAN)  
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)

## INTENT OF THE INTERVENTION

The *Smart Meal™ Seal* program is a practice-tested intervention designed to encourage the availability of healthier menu options in restaurants, and the selection of healthier options by restaurant customers with a goal of improving the eating habits of individuals who frequently dine out. The *Smart Meal™ Seal* program uses point-of-purchase labeling combined with outreach and education to market/promote healthier food options.

The *Smart Meal™ Seal* program primarily addresses the organizational and community levels of the socioecologic model.

## OVERVIEW

The *Smart Meal™ Seal* program uses easily recognizable decals, referred to as “seals”, to help eating establishment patrons identify options that are deemed healthier because they meet the program’s nutritional requirements. The seals are prominently displayed on front entrance doors of restaurants that are involved with the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program. In addition, the seals are placed on menus next to approved items.

**Intended Population:** Primary audience: Restaurant patrons, including individuals, families, and children eating away from home  
Secondary audience: Restaurant owners and staff

**Setting:** Community; Restaurants

**Length of time in the field:** Since 2007

## CORE ELEMENTS

*This section outlines the aspects of an intervention that are central to its theory and logic and that are thought to be responsible for the intervention’s effectiveness. Core elements are critical features of the intervention’s intent and design and should be kept intact when the intervention is implemented or adapted.*

- 1. Partnership with Restaurants:** COPAN partnered with the Colorado Restaurant Association and owners of large and small restaurants to help shape and define the *Smart Meal™ Seal program*. Restaurant chains and individual restaurants enter into an agreement with COPAN to participate in the program as a member restaurant. The formal agreement/membership includes a commitment to monitor/evaluate program implementation.

2. **Nutrition Criteria for Menu Items<sup>1</sup>:** COPAN developed/adapted nutrition criteria for menu items based on information and guidelines recommended by US Dietary Guidelines, Fruits and Veggies: More Matters, Western Dairy Council, American Heart Association, FDA nutrition labeling food guidelines, and the Winner's Circle-North Carolina Prevention Partners.
3. **Eligibility Criteria for Restaurants:** Restaurants must offer at least two main course or side menu items that meet or exceed all of the established nutrition criteria. Restaurants that meet eligibility criteria are sent an "Acceptance Letter" and *Smart Meal™ Seal* material packet by COPAN staff.
4. **Systematic Menu Analysis:** Restaurants must have a nutrition analysis completed on all menu items (recipes) to determine if menu items meet nutrition criteria. COPAN provides restaurant owners with a list of approved vendors to complete the nutrition analysis. Verification of the menu analysis is sent to the State Health Department and the participating restaurant.
5. **Menu Labeling System:** COPAN provides restaurants with a standard menu label, called a "meal seal," that can be used on printed menus, menu boards, table-top displays or menu inserts. The meal seal logo is used to label healthier meal options. Educational brochures that explain the labeling system are available for restaurant patrons.
6. **Marketing/Promotion Materials:** Consistent marketing and promotion of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program supports brand recognition by restaurant patrons. Window decals are used to let potential patrons know that the restaurant participates in the program. COPAN provides restaurants with advertising guidelines on appropriate use of the logo and wording for advertisements. In addition, COPAN maintains a list of participating restaurants on the website with active links to restaurant web sites.
7. **Training and Technical Assistance:** COPAN provides training for restaurant owners in-person or through a webinar. Training includes the elements of program implementation, marketing and evaluation. Technical assistance is available on request through the program website [www.smartmealcolorado.com](http://www.smartmealcolorado.com).

## RESOURCES REQUIRED

**Staff:** Due to some of the complexities of menu qualifications, it is preferable, although not required, for a Registered Dietitian (RD) to manage the program. For every 5 restaurants participating in the program, a minimum of 3 staff hours/week is necessary to successfully implement, manage and maintain the program. Additionally, a staff evaluator is recommended, contributing approximately 1.5 hours/week for every 5 participating restaurants.

### Training:

The training component of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program is two-pronged: training for restaurants and for organizations recruiting restaurants to participate in the program. Both of these trainings are available either in-person or in webinar format. All webinars are available at no cost. The cost for in- OR out-of-state, in-person trainings is solely to compensate intervention developers for the cost of travel (e.g., no additional fees.)

Details about these trainings can be found under *Training* in the **Implementation** section of this template.

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike the other guidelines, the eligibility criteria for the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program allows for the higher amounts of seasoning and salt often found in meals prepared at restaurants. Despite initial concerns about the higher sodium allowances, this criterion has been recently endorsed by the Colorado Dietetic Association.

### Other Costs:

- **\$90 per recipe/meal analyzed** – Potential *Smart Meal™ Seal* participating restaurants receive a discount if they use one of the recommended analysis companies for this service. This cost includes: the labor, technical assistance, full nutritional labeling for the recipe plus suggested recipe modifications to meet standards.
- **Menu reprinting costs** - Reprinting of the existing menu is necessary to reflect the identified *Smart Meal* items and/or printing of menu inserts if the restaurant is not yet ready to print new menus.

## IMPLEMENTATION

*Note: This section of the template provides a succinct outline of the basic steps to implement the intervention. A more detailed implementation guide is available in Intervention Materials, providing a thorough description of the implementation process.*

The *Smart Meal™ Seal* staff administers the program by providing guidance and conducting training on implementation of the program for participating restaurants and organizations that will recruit restaurants in their own communities (e.g., state and local health departments). Training is offered on the following aspects of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program: recruitment of restaurants, in-restaurant placement/marketing of *Smart Meal™ Seal* decals, marketing of program, and evaluation. Implementation materials are provided at the trainings free of charge. Restaurants are eligible to participate in the program if they offer at least two menu items that meet eligibility criteria determined by nutritional analysis conducted by an approved vendor. These approved menu items are then labeled by *Smart Meal™ Seal* decals in order to educate restaurant patrons about the healthy food options available for purchase.

The implementation of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program occurs at multiple levels including:

1. **Recruitment of participating restaurants** - To assist with the recruitment of restaurant owners, the Program Director developed a packet of recruitment materials including an invitation letter to introduce and explain the program and a quarter-page color brochure outlining the program, what restaurants need to do to participate, and the program's promotional efforts.
2. **Determination of eligibility/Nutritional analysis of menu items** - In order to qualify for the program, restaurants must submit recipes to an approved vendor for analysis and at least *two* main-course menu items must meet the following eligibility criteria. These items must provide:
  - Two or more servings of beans, whole grains, fruits or vegetables – one of which may be substituted with a serving of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent product (one serving for a side dish)
  - No more than 700 calories (300 calories for side dish)
  - No more than 30 percent of total calories from fat or 23 grams of total fat (10 grams for a side dish)
  - No more than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat or 8 grams of total fat (3 grams for a side dish)
  - No more than 0.5 grams of trans fat (no added or artificial trans fat)
  - No more than 1500 milligrams of sodium (650 for a side dish)

3. **Training** - The training component of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program is provided free of charge for restaurants and organizations recruiting restaurants to participate in the program. Details are provided below for each type of training:

- **Restaurants** – *Smart Meal™ Seal* staff provides training for restaurant owners or managers using an in-person format or via webinar on the *Smart Meal™ Seal* website - [www.smartmealcolorado.com](http://www.smartmealcolorado.com). Trained restaurant owners or managers are then able to train their own staff. *Smart Meal™ Seal* staff conduct training for restaurant staff upon special request. Restaurants owners are trained on the elements of program participation guidelines, qualification guidelines, implementation guidelines, advertising guidelines and evaluation components. The material that accompanies the training is provided free of charge.
- **Organizations** – *Smart Meal™ Seal* staff conduct in-person two-hour, or half-day trainings (train-the-trainer) for organizations (e.g., state and local health departments) wishing to recruit *Smart Meal™ Seal* restaurants in their own communities. This training is also available on the *Smart Meal™ Seal* website - [www.smartmealcolorado.com](http://www.smartmealcolorado.com) and includes training on the recruitment process, training packet materials, logic and process models, marketing materials, data and evaluation forms, and CDs with all of the documents and logos necessary to manage the program. This training is free of charge.

Materials provided at the trainings to restaurant owners and organizations are detailed in the **Intervention Materials** section of this template.

4. **In-restaurant placement and marketing of *Smart Meal™ Seal* decals** – In order to facilitate implementation of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program, one-on-one training and materials are provided to restaurant owners to provide guidance on placement and marketing of *Smart Meal™ Seal* decals, and education educating restaurant patrons about the purpose and goals of the program.
5. **Program Marketing** - Promotional efforts include: a time-limited promotional spot shown on the On-Demand feature of Comcast Television, a list of participating restaurants available on the Colorado Physical Activity Nutrition (COPAN) program website, the LiveWell Colorado web site and discounted membership to a national web-based promotional program “Healthy Dining Finder”. In addition to the program’s promotion efforts, restaurant owners are encouraged to produce their own in- and out-of store promotional items and campaigns.
6. **Evaluation** – Data collection tools are provided by *Smart Meal™ Seal* program developers to conduct on-site observations of the restaurants, to track and monitor sales data from participating restaurants and to collect qualitative data regarding the owners’ experiences and perceptions of the program. *Smart Meal™ Seal* staff coordinate all data collection with the exception of the sales data, which restaurant owners are asked to compile and submit to the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program on a monthly basis.

#### **Keys to Success:**

- The *Smart Meal™ Seal* program offers clearly labeled healthy food options in restaurants to identify a large number of healthy choices for consumers. 1,630 *Smart Meal™ Seal* options are labeled in 200 locations.

- Input and buy-in from diverse stakeholders to shape and define the program from both a public health and business perspective. In Colorado, some key partners included: COPAN, the 5 A Day Task Force, menu analysis companies, Colorado Restaurant Association, Colorado Dietetic Association, owners of large and small restaurants, Kaiser Permanente, LiveWell Colorado, Mayor's Office of Denver, and alumni association of Metropolitan State College of Denver that conducts an Apprentice Challenge using the *Smart Meal™ Seal* as its first business implementation challenge.
- Approved vendors that can analyze restaurant menus and recipes to determine program eligibility to eliminate staff time and encourage other partnerships.
- Media promotion of the program. In 2007 and 2008, McDonald's contributed over \$600,000 to marketing the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program in their Denver-metro area stores.
- The *Smart Meal™ Seal* program helps *restaurants market* themselves as healthier; thereby, creating an incentive for restaurants to participate and sustain the program.
- A screening process to ensure that each restaurant interested in implementing the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program meets criteria, including required analysis of menu items and training.
- The *Smart Meal™ Seal* program aligns otherwise competing restaurants together to form an informal alliance with a common goal – health and education.
- The program is not just limited to restaurants, but can be replicated anywhere food is provided or sold.
- Ability to utilize other partners to raise awareness (and demand) for the program.

#### **Barriers to Implementation:**

- For small restaurants:
  - The cost of menu item nutritional analysis may be a deterrent.
  - Funds for marketing may not be available.
- For large chains:
  - National approval to implement a 'local' program
- Funds are needed to support a central coordinating and monitoring agency or system.
- A 'champion' needs to be identified that is passionate about and believes in the program.
- Lack of program manager flexibility and creativity to be able to identify successful implementation strategies for different types of eating establishments

## **EVIDENCE REVIEW SUMMARY**

**Underlying Theory/Logic:** The *Smart Meal™ Seal* program addresses the individual, organizational and community levels of the socioecologic model.

**Strategy Used:** The *Smart Meal™ Seal* program includes an evidence-based strategy for healthy eating including:

- *Point-of-purchase labeling for healthy eating* designed to improve food choices through branding food options that meet set (or minimal) nutrition requirements with the logo of a respected organization (in this case the Colorado Physical Activity and Nutrition Program's *Smart Meal™ Seal* logo)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> A full description of the *Point-of-purchase labeling* strategy used in this intervention can be found on [www.center-trt.org](http://www.center-trt.org) with references to the sources of evidence to support this strategy.

**Research Findings and Evaluation Outcomes:** The *Smart Meal™ Seal* program was developed and evaluated in the field as a practice-based intervention.

- **Intervention Effect** (only McDonald's data available): The data showed statistically significant increases in *Smart Meal™ Seal* sales compared to the control area and statistically significant decreases in side order sales of non-Smart Meal items. McDonald's conducted a systematic evaluation of the intervention's effects on outcomes. They analyzed data on purchases for 1.5 years prior to implementation in July 2007 and one year after implementation in 110 restaurants and compared to 34 restaurants in a similar metro area that did not implement the program.

Pre- and post-intervention sales data for other restaurants implementing *Smart Meal™ Seal* program were not available at the time of this review.

## POTENTIAL PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

The *Smart Meal™ Seal* program has potential for a public health impact. This intervention is recommended for dissemination, as there is evidence to support the main strategy utilized - point of purchase labeling. A well-designed evaluation in one restaurant chain provides good support for the intervention's effects on customers' food purchases. The evaluation results found that the program resulted in increased healthy food purchases and decreased purchase of unhealthy foods. The intervention has potential for broad impact on the public's health. Many Americans eat out and, therefore, changing the food environment of restaurants has potential to reach many people. A further strength of this intervention is that it helps restaurants market themselves as providing healthier dining options, thereby creating an incentive for restaurants to adopt and maintain the program. At the time data were submitted for review, 200 locations offered 1,630 Smart Meal options.

**Reach:** While reviewers were unable to assess the actual reach and representativeness of the population reached by the intervention, the reach is likely broad, given that the target audience is restaurant patrons (including fast food restaurant customers) in the Metro Denver area and an additional eight urban, suburban, and rural counties in Colorado.

**Effectiveness:** The intervention was effective in McDonald's restaurants in increasing sales of Smart Meal and other healthier food options and decreasing sales of non-Smart Meal items.

**Adoption:** In Colorado, the intervention has been adopted by twenty different restaurants with a total of 200 locations. The locations represent two large, national chain restaurants, one international ski resort and small single-location restaurants. There is indication that this intervention is transportable in that it has been adopted in Sonoma County, California and will be adopted pending upcoming implementation trainings in Rhode Island and Vermont.

**Implementation:** Implementation of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program is monitored and supported by COPAN. Training and all necessary implementation materials are provided by COPAN for participating restaurants increasing the ease of implementation. All participating restaurants must submit recipes to independent, approved vendors for nutrient analysis to determine eligibility based on *Smart Meal™ Seal* requirements; thus increasing the fidelity of implementation.

**Maintenance:** Sustainability of this intervention is enhanced because the program developers have transitioned the training to the web, require that menu items be analyzed to determine their eligibility as a *Smart Meal™ Seal* item, and enter into a formal written agreement with restaurant owners before the training and implementation materials are provided. Sustainability is more likely in larger restaurants, as the \$90 cost for nutrient analysis of menu items can be a burden for small restaurants. In addition, smaller restaurants usually lack the capacity to track sales data of *Smart Meal™ Seal* purchases. Marketing will need to continue to keep up awareness.

## INTERVENTION MATERIALS

The following intervention materials are provided by the *Smart Meal™ Seal* staff during trainings offered for restaurant owners/managers and organizations/communities wishing to recruit *Smart Meal™ Seal* restaurants in their own areas or states. Access to these intervention materials must be approved by the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program administrator. A request for access can be submitted on the *Smart Meal™ Seal* website Contact page at:

<http://www.smartmealcolorado.com/home/contact.aspx>.

Available intervention materials include the following:

### Restaurant Recruitment

- Power Point Presentation that provides an overview of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program
- Benefits of participation in the program to present to restaurant managers
- Agreement and Membership Form requiring signatures from both restaurant staff and *Smart Meal™ Seal* program staff
- Acceptance letter to restaurant from the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program staff

### Implementation Tools

- Flow Chart that presents the step-by-step process for implementation
- Time Narrative that presents a yearly, detailed estimation of the step-by-step time required to build and sustain the program
- Checklist that provides quick steps for implementation of the major program components
- Frequently Asked Questions

### Program Marketing

- Brief description of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program, to be included either directly on the menu or as a menu insert
- One-page educational brochures that can be given directly to patrons to further explain the purpose and goals of the program as well as the nutritional requirements for *Smart Meal™ Seal*
- Eligibility guidelines and approved wording for advertising the *Smart Meal™ Seal* options
- Eligibility guidelines for the *Smart Meal Kids™* menu options
- *Smart Meal™ Seal* program decals to display on the front door entrance of the restaurant
- Electronic version of the program's logo to use on their menus to highlight eligible items
- *Smart Meal™ Seal* program advertisement guidelines for creating menu inserts, table inserts, and board displays

## Program Evaluation

- Observation Checklist to evaluate evidence of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program in the restaurant
- Restaurant Manager Interview Questions to evaluate the adoption of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program
- Data collection form to track the sales of *Smart Meal™ Seal* program options
- Online customer survey satisfaction (restaurant-specific)
- Community-based IVR data collection (community specific)

## TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Trainings on the implementation of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program are available for restaurant owners and managers, in addition to organizations and communities wishing to recruit restaurants in their own areas or states.

Trainings are available either in-person or in webinar format on the *Smart Meal™ Seal* website - [www.smartmealcolorado.com](http://www.smartmealcolorado.com).

For more information on the specific elements covered in the trainings for both Restaurants and Organizations, please see *Training* under the **Implementation** section of this template.

Please contact Shana Patterson at [shana.patterson@state.co.us](mailto:shana.patterson@state.co.us) for technical assistance on the implementation of the *Smart Meal™ Seal* program.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**Web links:** [www.smartmealcolorado.com](http://www.smartmealcolorado.com)

### Program Contact(s):

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***For more information on this intervention, visit [www.Center-TRT.org](http://www.Center-TRT.org).***