



- [▶ CENTER](#)
- [▶ RESEARCH & REPORTS](#)
- [▶ LEGISLATION](#)
- [▶ GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING](#)
- [▶ RESOURCES](#)




 CCPHA Website  Google


## RESOURCES: MENU LABELING

[Printable Page](#)

With the signing of SB 1420 (Padilla) into law, California became the first state in the nation to require calorie disclosure on menus and menu boards at chain restaurants. On July 1, the first phase of the new law went into effect requiring restaurant chains with 20 or more outlets in California to provide calorie, saturated fat, carbohydrate and sodium content information at the point of purchase. The measure will be fully in effect by 2011.

**Consumers need nutritional information to make informed choices.** Americans are eating more of their meals and snacks in restaurants and spending almost half of their food dollars on away from home foods.<sup>1</sup> More often than not, people can only guess at the nutritional quality of the food they are ordering, which is problematic because so many restaurant foods are heavy in fat, salt, and sugar. Moreover, menu items may be presented in ways that misrepresent the food as healthier than it actually is. Only one-third of restaurants currently provide any nutritional information about their menu items, and that information is often given in ways not readily useful to customers when ordering. Although most restaurants provide a range of food choices, without nutritional information directly on menus and menu boards it is difficult for consumers to compare options and make informed decisions. For people with chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, or those trying to reach or maintain a healthy weight, such nutritional information is all the more important.

**84% of Californians support requiring fast-food and chain restaurants to post nutritional information on menus and menu boards.**<sup>2</sup> In April 2007 CCPHA released [findings](#) of a Field Research Corporation poll on Californians' knowledge of caloric, fat, and salt content in restaurant foods and their attitudes about requiring fast-food and chain restaurants to post nutritional information. The poll found that support for mandatory menu labeling was strong across Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Californians want and deserve access to nutritional information at the point of sale.

**Posting nutritional information on menus and menu boards is an obesity and chronic disease prevention strategy that has potential for great success.** The County of Los Angeles Public Health Department's 2008 [health impact assessment](#) on menu labeling projects that such labeling would prevent 38.9% of the annual weight gain in the county. An August 2008 analysis, [Potential Impact of Menu Labeling of Fast Foods in California](#), released by the University of California's Center for Weight and Health shows that providing calorie information on menu boards could help Californians avoid more than two pounds of weight gain per year and allow California as a whole to drop millions of pounds annually.

In 2008, the New York City Department of Health projected that menu labeling in that city will prevent at least 30,000 new cases of diabetes over the next five years. Their research also shows that current industry disclosure practices, such as posting information online, on tray liners, or in brochures, are woefully inadequate: 95% of New York City diners did not see nutrition information provided in this way. However, the research suggests that patrons who do see calorie content prior to ordering choose meals with fewer calories than patrons who do not see calorie information.

An August 2008, Center for Science in the Public Interest study, [Kids' Meals: Obesity on the Menu](#), revealed that 93 percent of kids' meals at 13 top chain restaurants provide children with excess calories. Analyses of the nutritional quality of kids' meals at the top restaurant chains showed that 94 percent of 1,474 possible choices exceed 430 calories—an amount that is one-third of what the Institute of Medicine recommends children aged 4 through 8 should consume in a day.

**Local menu-labeling ordinances led the effort.** San Francisco signed a menu-labeling ordinance into law on March 24, 2008. The new law requires chain restaurants with 20 or more establishments in the city and county of San Francisco to post nutritional information on menus and menu boards. Review the ordinance [here](#).

On June 24, 2008, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a menu-labeling ordinance that will require large chain restaurants with 15 or more locations statewide to provide nutrition information on menus and menu boards. Read more [here](#).

New York City continues to make progress in the legal battle started by the New York Restaurant

Association, with a federal court clearing the way for the city to enact their 2007 menu-labeling ordinance. The ordinance requires chain restaurants to post calorie counts on menus and menu boards. As of July 2008, restaurants in New York City are posting calorie information on their menus and menu boards. To find out more about the ordinance, click [here](#). To view a sample menu board, click [here](#).

**Next Steps.** More than twenty states, cities and counties are considering legislation and regulations that would require fast-food and other chain restaurants to provide calories and other nutrition information on menus and menu boards. To see a map of jurisdictions working on menu labeling, click [here](#). To find out more about other states' efforts, click [here](#).

Federal menu labeling policy has been included as part of the federal health care reform effort. Identical menu labeling language is included in both the House (Energy & Commerce Committee bill) and Senate (Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee bill) versions of health care reform. The federal language would require restaurants chains with 20 or more outlets in the nation to post calorie information directly on menus and menu boards, including those used in drive-throughs. For more information, visit the Center for Science in the Public Interest website by clicking [here](#).

#### Resources.

- [Overview of California Menu Labeling Law](#)
- [SB 1420 partial list of support](#)
- [SB 1420 Sample Support Letter](#)
- [SB 1420 Fact Sheet](#)
- [Fast Food Nutrition Quiz](#) from the April 2007 Field Poll on menu labeling
- New York City study: [Purchasing Behavior and Calorie Information at Fast-Food Chains in New York City, 2007](#)
- [Pictures](#) of sample New York City menus and menu boards containing nutritional information
- County of Los Angeles Public Health Department study: [Menu Labeling as a Potential Strategy for Combating the Obesity Epidemic](#)

#### Footnotes.

<sup>1</sup> National Restaurant Association (NRA). "Industry at a Glance." Accessed at [http://www.restaurant.org/research/ind\\_glance.cfm](http://www.restaurant.org/research/ind_glance.cfm) on April 12 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Field Research Poll of 523 registered voters conducted March 20-31, 2007.