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BUSINESS HELPING MAKE THE HEALTHIER CHOICE THE EASY CHOICE

Results from a recent pilot program show business has a key role to play in improving the health of Canberrans.

The *Choose Healthier* local business pilot project was designed to explore how businesses could help tackle the challenge of obesity in our community. It was delivered by the ACT Government in partnership with the Canberra Business Chamber, the ACT Nutrition Support Service, and five local businesses.

"I want to sincerely thank IGA Drakeford and Nicholls, The Hellenic Club, Limelight Cinema and Tommy & Me Café for taking part in this pilot," Canberra Business Chamber CEO, Robyn Hendry said.

"Through their involvement we now have evidence that businesses can make a real difference, as well as a clearer understanding of the type of measures that can help consumers make healthier choices and what supports need to be in place for businesses."

With the assistance of nutritionists, each of the businesses introduced new menu items or provided information on healthy choices for their customers. They all reported significant positive changes in consumer purchasing decisions.

"One of the key findings we were looking for," Ms Hendry explained, "was the investment businesses had to make in order to cause change. Each of the businesses who participated found that with key supports in place, their costs were limited and demands on staff time weren't onerous."

"The result was that participating in the pilot program did not negatively affect business profitability. Customers made different, healthier purchasing choices and in some cases overall sales were increased due to the *Choose Healthier* program."

Businesses also found their involvement in the program was viewed favourably by customers and helped strengthen their brand in the marketplace.

"We have always known businesses want to be part of the solution," Ms Hendry said. "From this pilot we now know what needs to be done in order to enable businesses to get more involved."

Businesses that took part in the pilot found assistance from nutritionists and a central program manager key to the program's success. Promotion of the *Choose Healthier* brand is also important to ensure customers understand the program and recognise the commitment businesses are making to community health and wellbeing.

"The pilot tells us the levers we need to put in place to encourage more businesses help make the healthier choice the easy choice for Canberrans," Ms Hendry concluded.

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