

# A food service industry perspective on the barriers and facilitators to menu labelling implementation: A review of the evidence

Claire Kerins, Discipline of Health Promotion, NUI Galway

**Executive Summary:** Evidence suggests menu labelling interventions should form part of a comprehensive approach to improve dietary habits; however, implementation challenges have arisen. This review highlights key factors that are most likely to have an influence on menu labelling implementation in food service businesses. Frequently cited factors were related to the external context of food businesses (e.g. consumers, legislation), internal setting of food businesses (e.g. compatibility, available information and resources) and features of the menu labelling intervention (e.g. perceived benefits, cost). Review findings will help policy makers to select and tailor strategies to enhance the adoption, implementation and sustainability of menu labelling interventions.

## Why is this issue important?

The food service industry has an important role in promoting healthy dietary behaviours. To help increase transparency in the nutritional value of meals outside the home and to assist consumers in making both informed and healthier food choices, menu labelling is recommended as part of a comprehensive approach to stem the rise in diet-related chronic diseases. Menu labelling includes the provision of nutrition information on menus at the point of sale. While studies have identified challenges to menu labelling implementation (e.g. ranging from delays in legislation implementation to difficulties in providing accurate nutrition information), no previous review has focused on the challenges facing the key actors responsible for adopting menu labelling, the food service industry.

## What methods were used?

- A systematic review of peer reviewed and grey literature
- No restrictions on menu labelling scheme or format, study design or methods, language or publication year
- Results synthesised using the 'best fit' framework synthesis approach, with reference to the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research

## What were the review findings?

- 17 studies were eligible for inclusion
- Most studies were rated as average quality
- Multiple interdependent factors influenced implementation, many of which acted simultaneously as barriers and facilitators
- Summary of frequently cited barriers and facilitators (i.e. those discussed in  $\geq 12$  studies) are presented below

Barriers	
<u>Consumer Needs &amp; Resources</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of customer demand for/interest in menu labelling</li> <li>• risk of overwhelmed/confused customers</li> <li>• interference with customer dining experience</li> </ul>	<u>External Policies &amp; Incentives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• absence of legislation</li> <li>• lack of monitoring and enforcement</li> <li>• lack of guidelines</li> <li>• fears of liability due to inaccurate information</li> </ul>
<u>Compatibility</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of standardised recipes/menus</li> <li>• limited space on menus</li> <li>• frequent menu changes/variations</li> <li>• too many products/menu items</li> </ul>	<u>Cost</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cost of nutritional analysis</li> <li>• cost of changing menu/displays</li> <li>• cost of printing nutrition information</li> </ul>

Facilitators	
<u>Relative Advantage</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improved business image/reputation</li> <li>• attracting/retaining customers</li> </ul>	<u>Consumer Needs &amp; Resources</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• customer demand for/interest in menu labelling</li> <li>• providing nutrition information to customers</li> <li>• enabling informed food choices</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

Implementation of menu labelling is influenced by multiple interdependent factors. The findings can be used by policy makers and other stakeholders to select, tailor and test strategies to address barriers that impede implementation and to leverage facilitators that assist with implementation effort.

## Implications & Recommendations

- Develop a convincing business case for menu labelling - frame the benefits
- Engage consumers in order to increase uptake and demand for menu labelling
- Introduce menu labelling legislation alongside adequate levels of monitoring and enforcement

**Reference:** C Kerins, S McHugh, J McSharry, CM Reardon, C Hayes, JJ Perry, F Geaney, S Seery, C Kelly. Barriers and facilitators to implementation of menu labelling interventions from a food service industry perspective: a mixed methods systematic review. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*. 2020;17(1):48. Read full paper [here](#).

**This research was conducted as part of the SPHeRE Programme, and funded by the Health Research Board.**



For more information, please contact: [c.kerins2@nuigalway.ie](mailto:c.kerins2@nuigalway.ie) or via Twitter @claire\_kerins