



The Healthy Environments Partnership Urges Congress to Improve Access to Nutritious Foods in Low-income Communities of Color

Project Overview

- The Healthy Environments Partnership (HEP) is a community-based participatory research project comprised of multiple partners including Brightmoor Community Center, Detroit Department of Health and Wellness Promotion, Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation, Friends of Parkside, Henry Ford Health System, Rebuilding Communities, Inc., and the University of Michigan School of Public Health. For more information about HEP contact Sharon Sand at (734) 763-0017.
- Established in 2000 through funding from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, **HEP develops, implements, and evaluates interventions in Detroit, Michigan to reduce racial/ethnic and socioeconomic inequities in cardiovascular disease (CVD).**

Background: Low-income communities of color have poor access to healthful foods, placing residents at increased risk of cardiovascular disease and other diet-related chronic diseases

- 1 in 3 American adults suffers from some form of cardiovascular disease (CVD). Heart disease and stroke, two common forms of CVD, are the first and third leading causes of death in the U.S.
- Fruit and vegetable consumption is inversely associated with cardiovascular disease and total mortality in the general U.S. population. Consuming fruits and vegetables at least 3 times a day compared with less than once per day has been associated with 27% lower CVD mortality and 15% lower total mortality.
- The presence of food stores that sell fresh produce increases the likelihood of meeting USDA recommendations for fruit and vegetable consumption. For example, one study found that living near a supermarket increased fruit and vegetable consumption by more than 30% among African Americans.
- Residents of Detroit have poor access to retail food stores — such as supermarkets, grocery stores, and specialty produce vendors — that sell fresh fruits and vegetables and other nutritious foods. In 2007, Detroit had only 1 supermarket compared to 138 supermarkets in the surrounding metropolitan area.
- On average, African American residents living in Detroit's poorest neighborhoods have to travel 1 mile farther to get to a supermarket or large grocery store than residents living in White neighborhoods.

Research intervention: Town hall meetings and focus groups with Detroit residents

- HEP conducted a community planning process to identify priorities for a multi-level intervention to improve food access in Detroit. Priorities identified include: increasing availability of affordable and nutritious foods at existing retail food stores, establishing farmers' markets and other farm-direct market venues, and reducing exposure to stores that sell primarily liquor, tobacco, or highly processed high-fat, high-sugar foods.

Policy recommendations

- Support efforts to establish a National Fresh Food Financing Initiative to provide fresh food retailers with an incentive to locate in low-income communities of color and existing food stores with funds to support renovation and expansion of stores so they can provide nutritious foods. A model program in Pennsylvania helped to develop 68 new or improved food stores and to create or retain 3,700 jobs in just four years.
- Make produce at farmers' markets more affordable to the more than 1,256,000 Michigan residents who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formally the Food Stamp Program), which helps low-income individuals and families to buy high-quality nutritious foods using Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. Provide grants to farmers' markets to develop the capacity to take EBT and to promote the program to the community.
- Write a letter of support for community-based participatory research to study the impact of point-of-purchase pilot programs to encourage low-income individuals and families to buy fresh fruits and vegetables.

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