

AT A GLANCE

Nutrition insecurity, the inability to access fruits, vegetables, and nutritious foods, affects over 35,000 people in Savannah, Georgia. This issue impacts people residing in food apartheid areas, or communities in which social inequities cause nutrition insecurity. While grocery stores are not available in food apartheid areas, neighborhood corner stores that offer foods high in fat, sugar, and sodium are common. Healthy Savannah launched the Healthy Corner Store Initiative, a partnership with local corner store owners to bring healthy choices to the community. Seven stores have enrolled in the initiative, and positive responses from the community and local government will increase participation.



PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

Approximately 35,000 people in Savannah, Georgia struggle with nutrition security. These factors include distance to grocery stores, lack of transportation, and systemic issues such as poverty and discriminatory traditions. Communities where people experience nutrition insecurity were originally referred to as “food deserts,” which implied that the lack of healthy foods in these areas were naturally occurring. In recent years, the term “food apartheid” has been used. Food apartheid acknowledges that social injustice causes nutrition insecurity experienced by people of color. In food apartheid areas, regular consumption of fast food contributes to the chronic disease burden, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and high blood pressure. Change is needed to normalize the accessibility of fresh fruits, vegetables, and healthy non-perishable goods.

“Both the store owners and patrons love the program. The owners feel they’re providing an excellent and needed service to the community. At the same time, he customers appreciate the ability to have access to fresh produce.”

-Deidre Grim

APPROACH

The community has long asserted the importance of having healthy foods in corner stores. Healthy Savannah consistently heard this need through community outreach for over seven years. 52% of people surveyed by Healthy Savannah would like to purchase healthy foods at corner stores, and 75% believe it is extremely important to have healthy foods available.

The layout of stores and the food available influences what shoppers buy and consume. To meet the needs of the community, Healthy Savannah launched the Healthy Corner Store Initiative. The initiative partners with neighborhood corner stores to help them offer healthier foods, including fruits, vegetables, and healthy snacks. Technical assistance with the promotion and marketing of new items is also provided. Healthy Savannah seeks to enroll stores that are in areas where underserved people live and are currently or willing to accept SNAP benefits. This initiative is an early step in making meaningful changes to challenge the prevalence of nutrition insecurity.

RESULTS

Healthy Savannah engages with and assesses potential stores for the Healthy Corner Store Initiative in priority neighborhoods. As of Spring 2022, seven stores have enrolled and offer healthier choices. More stores are in the assessment phase, and at least four more are expected to become partners by the end of the year. While the impact of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative will be seen in the long term, recent survey data shows that more people are purchasing healthy foods at local corner stores. According to the 2021 Healthy Savannah Community Survey, 48% of shoppers purchased healthy foods there, compared to 39% in 2019, a 23% increase. Additionally, 57% of survey respondents redeemed their SNAP benefits at corner stores. The response from shoppers has been positive, changes in layout and promotion have influenced sales, and store owners are open to further participation.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Awareness of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative is growing, primarily through media coverage and outreach. The Healthy Corner Store initiative received the attention of the City of Savannah government. In December 2021, Healthy Savannah was awarded a \$10,000 Community Partnership Program Grant from the city to support the initiative through 2022. Healthy Savannah has reached its performance targets and will apply for annual funding from the city. Healthy Savannah will continue to foster relationships with neighborhood stores and search for additional opportunities to continue this important work.

FIND OUT MORE

To learn more about the Healthy Corner Store Initiative, visit www.healthysavannah.org/healthy-corner-store-initiative and www.healthysavannah.org/nutrition-destination

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