

# HEALTHY SAVANNAH



## MAKING THE HEALTHIER CHOICE THE EASIER CHOICE

### COVID-19 OUTCOMES AND DIET

- As of July 1, 2021, 44% (126,812) of people in Chatham County have received at least one dose of the COVID vaccine, 40% are fully vaccinated.
- As of July 1, 2021, there have been **23,718 COVID cases** and **463 COVID related deaths** in Chatham County.
- **Persons living in low-income neighborhoods that also had a poor diet quality score were 25% more susceptible to COVID-19 infection.** These neighborhoods also have disproportionally less access to grocery stores and healthy food options, often the only food access within walking distance is at convenience stores (see map below of grocery store locations). In addition, during focus groups held in Savannah in spring 2021, community members indicated that they wanted more access to healthy food both at grocery stores near the check out areas but also greater access to healthy food within their communities (see quotes in the Focus Group section). **Almost all of the participants indicated that if healthy options were available near the checkout they would buy them instead of the junk food.**
- Researchers found that **diet is the most important factor in terms of COVID-19 infection.** Diet was independent of all other risk factors such as age, weight, and underlying health conditions for a person having COVID-19.<sup>5</sup>
- Research teams found that people eating a high-quality diet had better outcomes related to COVID-19.

### LOCAL HEALTH DISPARITIES

Chronic diseases remain a threat to well-being for residents of Savannah. The accessibility and affordability of healthy food disproportionately impacts certain communities, and change is urgently needed to forge a path towards health equity.

Policies and systemic structures continue to limit accessibility to healthy food options for individuals in low-wealth communities, which is directly linked to poor health outcomes. Healthy Savannah believes that the implementation of a Healthy Checkout Ordinance in Savannah will directly improve access to healthy foods.

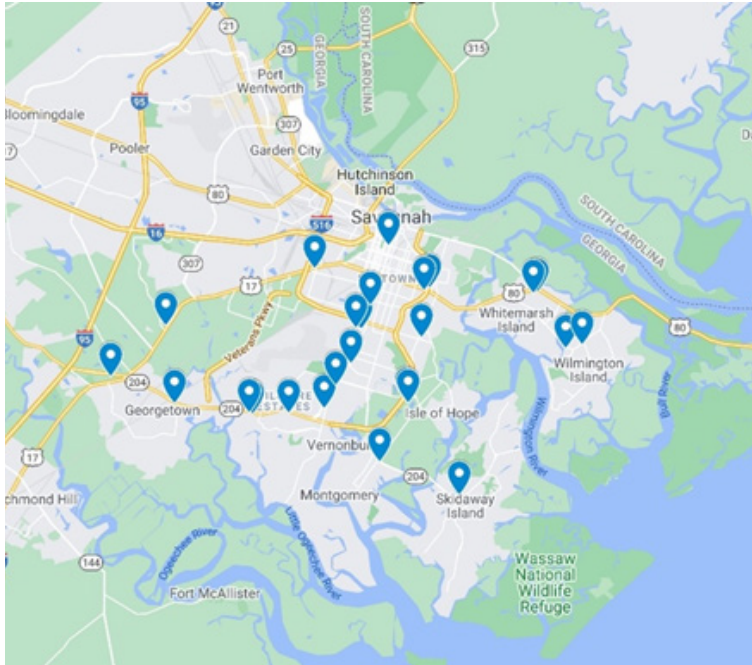
### SAVANNAH'S HEALTH CHALLENGES<sup>1</sup>

- **Diabetes:** 13.5%
  - 9% of all residents were diabetic in 2017
  - 27% of those over 65 were diabetic
- **High Blood Pressure:** 36.1%
- **High Cholesterol:** 29.9%
  - 29.3% of all residents had high cholesterol in 2017
  - 37.7% of those over 65 had high cholesterol
- **Heart Disease:** 6.2%
- **Stroke:** 4.0%
- 17.6% of all residents in Chatham County were food insecure<sup>2</sup>
- **Children:**
  - 60% of children 2-5 years of age consume more than the recommended amount of sugar daily
  - Highly sugary snacks are heavily marketed towards children – 73% of food advertisements use familiar characters to target children<sup>6</sup>
  - 21.8% of children in Chatham County are food insecure



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## Location of Grocery Stores in Savannah



## GROCERY STORE SURVEY

According to the Healthy Savannah Community Survey in 2020:

- Most respondents currently do their shopping and purchase healthy food at grocery stores (86%) and convenience stores (45%).
- About half (49%) of respondents ate fresh vegetables every day and fresh fruit every day (45%).
- Healthy food at neighborhood stores was important to the majority (69%).
- There are 25 primary grocery stores in Savannah which were all surveyed using a standardized observational tool.
  - The average number of queues was 6.6, ranging from 0-26. Each queue was evaluated during the observation point.

Type of Checkout	Total Queues	Total Observed Queues
Express Checkout	15	15
Self-Checkout	165	165
Family Friendly Checkout	8	8
<b>Total Checkouts</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>365</b>

Type of Merchandise	# of Facings	% of Facings (in category)
<b>Food</b>		
Candy	116	14%
Gums & Mint	98	12%
Chips & Pretzels	84	10%
Cookies & Cakes	74	9%
Granola & Cereal bars	44	5%
Energy & Power bars	67	8%
Trail mix (with candy)	82	10%
Nuts, Seeds, & Trail mix (no candy)	79	9%
Dried & Canned Fruit & Vegetables	6	1%
Fresh Fruit & Vegetables	11	1%
Dried Meat/Jerky	62	7%
Other Food	123	15%
<b>Drinks</b>		
Energy Drinks	60	20%
Sweetened Beverages	67	22%
100% Juice	14	5%
Water/Seltzer	68	23%
Diet/Non-Caloric Beverages	66	22%
Other Drinks -- Indicate Type	24	8%
<b>Other</b>		
Books, Magazines, & Other Print	117	33%
Phone & Gift cards	101	28%
Batteries	63	18%
Film & Cameras	10	3%
Personal care products	51	14%
Audio, Video, & Other	2	1%
Technology	-	-
Children's Toys & Games	3	1%
Other	9	3%

## FOCUS GROUP

Feedback from community members during locally conducted focus groups also indicates a great interest and desire for healthy checkout options<sup>3</sup>:

- **“We would love to have local produce at the grocery store or a convenience store, in addition to the regular produce.”**
- They are more likely to buy candy and treats because they are right at the checkout location and easy to pick up, if they had to look for them in the store they would be less likely to buy them.
- Cost matters, when things are on sale they are more likely to buy them. This is true for both candy and treats as well as healthy food options.
- They would like to see more produce on sale at the front of the store and on sale more often.
- They would like to have fruits and vegetables closer to the checkout aisle.
- Kids are more likely to ask for treats that they see at the front check out aisles. Having fresh fruits for the kids to eat while parents shop is really helpful and it makes it less likely for the kids and parents to buy the junk food.
- They would like to have a scale for weighing items and have fresh produce, healthy bread, pre-priced older vegetables, and water for sale at the checkout aisles.
- Almost all the participants indicated they would support a move to require stores to have a healthy checkout aisle.
- **Almost all of the participants indicated that if healthy options were available near the checkout they would buy them instead of the junk food.**

## RESEARCH

Based on data from the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) research on healthy grocery stores<sup>4</sup>:

- Grocery stores are the main sources for calories in the American diet (70%)
- The grocery store is a planned retail environment. Food choices are strongly affected by the environment in which they are made
  - “It is not that shoppers aren’t capable of making healthy choices...it’s that, in many cases, they are being pushed towards unhealthy options. Big food manufacturers are pulling the strings to maximize their own profitability. That sabotages our efforts to eat healthier.”
- Grocery stores have a responsibility to their community to improve community health
- 52% of American grocery shoppers think grocery stores have a responsibility to improve the health of the communities they serve
- 73% of American grocery shoppers think grocery stores should do more to make it easier for people to eat healthy
- 82% of American grocery shoppers think grocery stores should promote healthier options
- 54% of American grocery shoppers say they would purchase healthier food if it was easier to find
- 70% of people consider healthier checkout a benefit to the shopping experience
- 2/3 of shoppers would choose a grocery store with healthier items at the checkout
  - 44% of shoppers would switch from their regular grocery stores to a store that offered healthy checkout
  - 78% of parents who shop with their children agree

Incorporating healthier food options at the checkout make it easier for shoppers to choose the healthier choice.

## SOURCES

1. Georgia OASIS data system, BRFSS data and 2017/2018 CDC Places data.
2. USDA and Feeding America
3. Healthy Savannah focus groups Spring 2021.
4. CSPI Focus groups
5. ZOE Presentation, “COVID-19 and Diet: Does What You Eat Matter?”
6. <https://healthyeatingresearch.org/focus-areas/food-beverage-marketing>