

FOOD RETAILERS PARTNER WITH LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES TO FIGHT OBESITY SOLUTIONS IN LOCAL ACCESS TO FRESH, HEALTHY FOOD

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Food Retailers Partner with Low-Income Communities to Fight Obesity Solutions in Local Access to Fresh, Healthy Food

Oakland, CA (October 12, 2005): An often-ignored contributor to poor health is lack of access to good quality, affordable healthy food. Residents in low-income communities have limited options for healthy eating and often resort to buying unhealthy foods at corner stores or fast food outlets. Certainly, people choose what they eat – but their choices are based on availability.

Across the nation, communities are addressing this issue, often by partnering food retailers with residents and policymakers. The new PolicyLink report, [Healthy Food, Healthy Communities: Improving Access and Opportunities through Food Retailing](#), shows how low-income communities are accessing healthy, affordable, good quality food – right in their neighborhoods.

New grocery stores are locating in poor communities and spurring economic development. Small stores are stocking healthier options, promoting local small business development, and even turning “problem” locations into community assets. Farmers’ markets are sustaining small farms while providing fresh, local food, opportunities for small business development, as well as a social space. Residents are benefiting from renewed, vibrant, and healthier communities.

Angela Glover Blackwell, Founder and CEO of PolicyLink, explains that “PolicyLink developed [Healthy Food, Healthy Communities](#) to address one important contributor to disparities in obesity and related health conditions: the limited access that many residents of low-income communities and communities of color have to affordable, healthy food. Increasing local healthy food retailing can improve the health of residents and the broader health of the communities in which they live.”

[Healthy Food, Healthy Communities: Improving Access and Opportunities through Food Retailing](#) was funded by a grant from The California Endowment (TCE). This report builds on earlier work about the effects of community factors on health that was developed by PolicyLink in partnership with TCE, Reducing

Health Disparities Through a Focus on Communities.

“California, like the rest of the nation, is facing an obesity epidemic,” said Robert K. Ross, MD, President and CEO of The California Endowment. “And because of this crisis, today’s youth may live shorter lives than their parents. Policymakers, business leaders, philanthropists, and advocates should take bold steps to make it easier for all Californians, especially the underserved, to make healthy choices in food consumption.”

Across the nation, food retailers are overcoming the challenges of developing new grocery stores in low-income communities:

- State and city governments are earmarking funds for grocery store developments in underserved communities.
- Vacant land, abandoned properties, and existing smaller sites are being adapted.
- Community organizations are partnering in -- sometimes even owning and operating -- grocery store development.

Small stores are also being considerably improved:

- Community groups are encouraging small stores to increase shelf space for fresh produce by generating community interest, documenting unmet demand, subsidizing the cost of adding new merchandise, and providing assistance with buying, selling, and displaying produce.
- Financial and technical assistance resources are being targeted to small-scale food retailers in low-



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income communities who are willing to improve their selection of healthy foods.

[Healthy Food, Healthy Communities](#) describes examples of successful programs in Baltimore, Boston, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Newark, New York City, Providence, St. Louis, Washington, DC, and throughout California and Pennsylvania, and showcases the important role of state and local governments in increasing access to healthy food in low-income communities.

The problem isn't yet solved—these success stories are too isolated and fail to reach the vast majority of communities in need. Many communities still lack access to affordable, healthy food. Policymakers, business leaders, community organizations, and foundations need to join together to identify ways to spread these kinds of innovative solutions to more underserved communities across the country.

[Healthy Food, Healthy Communities: Improving Access and Opportunities through Food Retailing](#) can be found at www.policylink.org, along with a sample Community Food Assessment, that allows you to think about how your community compares to others on food access. Rebecca Flournoy, co-author of the report, is available for interview. To speak with Rebecca, or for more information, please contact Thaler Pekar at 917-502-9010, or Katrin Kark at kkark@policylink.org or 212- 629-9570.

PolicyLink is a national nonprofit research, communications, capacity building, and advocacy organization, dedicated to advancing policies to achieve economic and social equity based on the wisdom, voice, and experience of local constituencies, with offices in Oakland, CA and New York, NY. PolicyLink bridges the traditional divides between communities and the world of policymakers by lifting up what works®.

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