



HEALTH BRIEFS

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BOOSTING HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS IN CORNER STORES IN JAMAICA, QUEENS

KEY FINDINGS

Public Health Solutions' (PHS) 2014 Queens Neighborhood Street Mapping project, funded by the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, prompted a two-pronged follow-up initiative in Jamaica, Queens:

1. A survey of corner stores to determine what types of foods were available, product placement and in-store marketing; and
2. An intervention to increase healthy food availability and improve visibility.

- Supporting corner storeowners with signage, healthy food displays, merchandising, and education about sourcing and choosing healthier items proved to be a successful intervention to increase availability and improve placement and promotion of healthy food items.
- After PHS' intervention, over half of all participating stores reported increased sales of fruit, and sixty-three percent of participating storeowners reported stocking more healthy items. These results demonstrate the utility of creating merchandising displays near the checkout featuring healthy items.
- Eight out of nine participating storeowners reported that the project had a positive impact on the store's appearance. Aggregating healthy options into attractive and prominent store displays helps put these foods front and center.

BACKGROUND

In New York City, corner stores, sometimes known as "bodegas", are ubiquitous. These stores have less space to stock a variety of foods, especially perishable items, which are often healthier but also more difficult to source, store, and market to customers. As such, these stores are often a source of unhealthy and empty

calorie foods, which may contribute to health disparities in their communities. PHS devised an intervention to work with stores in Jamaica, Queens, where corner stores abound, to support increased availability and sales of healthier foods.

STUDY

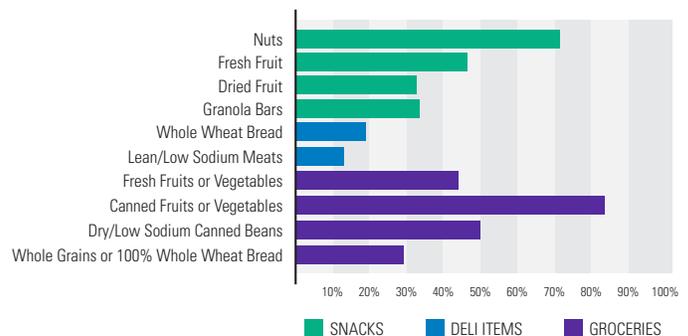
In order to assess potential areas for support and intervention, we devised a data collection tool to gather information about product availability, marketing, and placement in Jamaica corner stores. After completing observations in approximately 140 stores, the PHS team returned to 55 stores to ask staff to complete a short survey to gather more information about their store, their distributors, and their customer habits. Twenty seven staff took part.

FINDINGS

Store Observations

Over half (63%) of the 139 stores stocked at least one type of fresh fruit or vegetable, and canned vegetables were the most commonly observed healthy food. Nuts were the most common healthy snack observed.

HEALTHY FOODS STOCKED AT CORNER STORES



Fresh fruit merchandized as a snack, placed near cash registers or in proximity to other snack foods, was present in fewer than half of stores. Deli counters proved a more difficult store area in which to find healthier options. Whole wheat bread for sandwiches was promoted at fewer than 20 percent of corner store delis, and lean or low-sodium meat options were rarer still. Loaves of whole wheat bread were available at less than one-third of stores.

DISPLAYS SEEN WITHIN 5 SECONDS OF ENTERING



76%
PACKAGED SNACKS



54%
DELI COUNTERS



26%
FRESH FRUIT
OR VEGETABLE



11%
ANOTHER
HEALTHY ITEM

INTERVENTION

PHS identified nine stores to work with to support healthy changes in product availability, placement, and promotion of healthy foods. These stores were selected based on two criteria: having indicated interest in working with PHS during their interview, and proximity to PHS' Neighborhood WIC center in downtown Jamaica.

To assist target stores, PHS offered signage, merchandisers, food preparation equipment, technical assistance, and education about sourcing healthier items. The PHS team presented owners and managers with a "menu of services", including countertop display baskets; flat display baskets; and large freestanding, three-tiered floor baskets.* Technical assistance and education focused on choosing, sourcing, and merchandising healthier foods, including providing lists of specific products available from local distributors.

Outcomes

PHS conducted an in-store evaluation with all nine intervention stores. Over half of the stores reported increased sales of fruit at the conclusion of the project and one quarter of stores reported increased sales of vegetables and healthy deli combos.

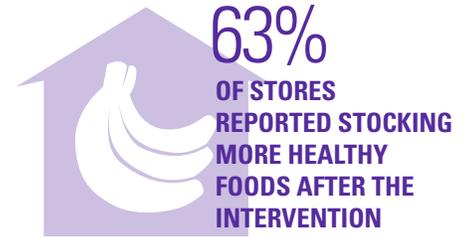
Eight out of nine owners reported that the project had a positive impact on the store's appearance. While most stores were already selling some healthy options such as nuts, healthier granola bars, water bottles, and fruit, they were often scattered throughout stores and surrounded by unhealthy foods. Simply placing signs by these healthy items proved less effective. Instead, aggregating healthy options into attractive and prominent displays helped put these foods front and center.

When asked about future plans, most owners and managers reported interest in continuing to stock and sell healthy foods post intervention.

CONCLUSION

Our work with corner stores in Jamaica, Queens gathered valuable data about the local food retail environment.

Intervention stores took important steps toward increasing the stock and sales of healthier foods in their communities.



Recommendations & Interventions

1. Practitioners should continue to focus and capitalize on increasing access to healthy foods in the deli and prepared food sections of corner stores.
2. Aggregating and placing healthy foods toward the front of stores and at point of purchase is a best practice.
3. When working with stores in Jamaica, Queens, ensure availability of Arabic-language materials and resources. Issues of language and cultural backgrounds must be considered when building partnerships, including with trade associations and groups representing store interests.

*Many of our strategies were based on the NYC DOHMH's Shop Healthy program and promotional materials from Shop Healthy were re-branded with Queens' language.

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Public Health Solutions (PHS) is the largest public health nonprofit serving New York City. For over 60 years, PHS has improved health outcomes and helped families thrive by providing services directly to the city's most vulnerable populations, publishing groundbreaking research that moves public health policy and practice forward, and supporting over 200 community-based organizations through our long-standing government partnerships. For more information, visit healthsolutions.org.