

Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) position statement: provide funding for incentive programs to expand healthy food offerings in SNAP-authorized small food stores

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Abstract

Individuals and families with limited access to healthy foods often experience increased risk for poor diet and chronic disease. Low-income communities are more likely to have a large number of small food stores (e.g., corner stores and dollar stores) compared to higher-income communities. Since many of these small food stores participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), increasing healthy food offerings in these stores may expand healthy food retail in low-income communities. We recommend the provision of funding for incentive programs that encourage SNAP-authorized small food stores in low-income communities to expand their healthy food offerings. This programming should (a) provide seed grants to store owners to develop or reconfigure store infrastructure, (b) offer store owners technical assistance and educational materials on marketing strategies for promoting healthy food items to customers, and (c) give a tax break to SNAP-authorized small food stores in low-income communities that maintain a predetermined minimum stock of U.S. Department of Agriculture-recognized staple foods.

Keywords

SNAP, Healthy food, Incentives, Small food store, Low income

POSITION STATEMENT

The Society of Behavioral Medicine supports the funding of incentive programs for small food stores to support the expansion and maintenance of healthy food retail in low-income communities.

THE PROBLEM

- Residing in a community with limited access to healthy food can increase an individual's risk for poor diet quality and obesity [1–3]. Unfortunately, low-income communities are less likely to have stores that sell a wide variety of healthy foods (e.g., supermarkets) compared to higher-income communities [4–7].
- Low-income communities often have a large number of small food stores (e.g., dollar stores, corner stores, gas stations, and liquor stores) [4]. Because small food stores often carry few staple food items, such as fresh

Implications

Practice: Health practitioners and educators at organizations engaged in nutritional equity endeavors should collaborate with owners of SNAP-authorized small food stores to raise awareness of the increased supply of healthy food in the community among residents.

Policy: Policymakers should designate funding for incentive programs that enable SNAP-authorized small food stores to expand their supply of healthy foods (e.g., fresh fruit and vegetables).

Research: Future research should assess the effectiveness of incentive programs that aim to support SNAP-authorized small stores' efforts to expand their supply of healthy foods. Key outcomes to consider are store owner satisfaction and the nutritional quality of customer food and beverage purchases.

fruits and vegetables, low-income communities often have high availability of calorie-dense foods, such as salty snacks, candy, and sugary beverages [8–11]. The overall healthfulness of customer purchases in small food stores has been linked to the types of foods and beverages stocked and promoted [12,13].

- Since many small food stores in low-income communities accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits [9,14,15], increasing the healthy food offerings in SNAP-authorized small food stores may be a viable strategy for increasing healthy food retail and purchasing in low-income areas of the USA [14–22].
- Supporting the business of SNAP-authorized small food stores in low-income communities may strengthen the local economy, particularly in rural areas of the country where smaller food stores are a key source of food [12].
- To increase healthy food offerings in SNAP-authorized small food stores, programs must be established to help store owners overcome key barriers to healthy food retail expansion [23–27]. The lack of technical assistance,

educational support, and store infrastructure (i.e., space and refrigeration) needed to stock, maintain, and market healthy food to the community [23–25] often deter store owners from offering more healthy foods. Store owners' attitudes and cooperation are critical factors to consider when implementing strategies that expand healthy food retail in small food stores [26,27]. Furthermore, small food store owners often express a willingness to stock more healthy food options if it is profitable [23,24,26].

CURRENT POLICY

Prior federal policies and initiatives that aimed to expand the supply of healthy foods in small food stores were limited in reach or faced key challenges [9,15,28–36].

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) attempted to strengthen the mandatory stocking requirements for all SNAP-authorized food stores in the USA. However, the USDA's proposed changes to the requirements were not implemented as planned.
 - A proposal to modify the minimum stocking requirements for SNAP-authorized food stores was included in the Agricultural Act of 2014 [28–35]. Although the proposed changes were not implemented, a final rule change did require stores to slightly increase the number of stocking units for each staple food option [29].
 - Small food store owners expressed concerns about the lack of funding and technical assistance offered to support their compliance with this rule change [31,32]. No plans to address these concerns or revisit the stocking requirements for SNAP-authorized food stores were included in the Agricultural Act of 2018 [34].
- The Federal Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) aimed to expand healthy food access in low-income communities by supporting projects that increase healthy food retail space [35–37]. Unfortunately, the HFFI had specific limitations.
 - HFFI funds were leveraged to support healthy food retail expansion projects. These projects added millions of square feet of healthy food retail space in low-income communities by (a) supporting the development of new grocery stores and supermarkets or (b) providing one-time small grants to small food stores [35–37].
 - Despite its many successes, the HFFI was not designed to provide small food stores with long-term support or incentive to continue stocking and marketing healthy foods. Furthermore, the HFFI did not reach low-income communities in several U.S. states and rural areas [37].

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide seed grants to store owners to develop or re-configure store infrastructure (e.g., refrigeration and shelving) to expand and promote healthy food offerings.

- Offer store owners (a) technical assistance to approve their ability to manage the equipment needed to track and sustain their healthy food supply and (b) educational materials on marketing strategies for promoting their healthy food items to the community (e.g., signage, sampling, and point-of-purchase promotions).
- Give a tax break to SNAP-authorized small food stores in low-income communities that maintain a predetermined minimum stock of USDA-recognized staple foods.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

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Ethical Approval: This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors. This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

Informed Consent: This study does not involve human participants and informed consent was, therefore, not required.

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