

PROBLEM

Lower income families do not have easy access to healthy foods

**Make Sure All Texans
Get A's in Healthy Eating!**
Available, Affordable and Accessible!



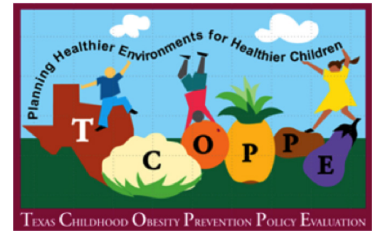
- 1 Grocery stores too far to travel
- 2 Fewer fresh fruits and vegetables
- 3 Focus on candy and junk food
- 4 Unhealthy food discounts
- 5 Fresh, healthy food more expensive
- 6 Few low or no fat milk choices
- 7 WIC products on lower shelves, less visible

SOLUTION

Increase healthy food options available



Through the combined efforts of the Texas A&M Health Science Center School of Public Health and The University of Texas School of Public Health, a recent study - **Texas Childhood Obesity Prevention Policy Evaluation (T-COPPE)** - investigated the impact the food shopping environment has on what foods families ultimately buy and consume. Findings from this study show the food shopping environment is an important determinant of healthier food choices, affecting both WIC shoppers and potentially the general population.



THE SITUATION

The food shopping environment has a strong influence on what foods families ultimately buy and consume, and their subsequent health outcomes. If healthy choices are not affordable, available and easy to access, shoppers will not be able to make the best choices for their families, even if they want to eat healthy. A recent study by TCOPPE identified and confirmed the specific problems lower income families face when shopping for groceries when they examined the differences in food shopping environments in WIC-authorized vendors. Not only do these problems affect our poorest families, they also impact every shopper who uses the closest, easiest place to make a purchase. This is particularly discouraging in our rural communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Create food policy councils as a way to improve the food environment at state and local levels. Food policy councils can provide support and advise residents and governments on how to develop policies and programs to improve local food systems. The goal is to increase access to and the availability of affordable, healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables. Food policy councils should include stakeholders from public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Members represent a wide array of interests, including nutrition, health, agriculture, education, policy, community design, and commerce.

AVAILABILITY

- Work with the state to assure culturally appropriate food items are incorporated into WIC packaging
- Advocate for nutrition education regarding changes in the WIC package and make sure consumers are aware of the increase in allowance for fruits and vegetables
- Develop nutrition programs that educate consumers on how to properly store and prepare fresh fruits and vegetables

AFFORDABILITY

- Recommend policies that stretch WIC dollars and allow shoppers to purchase more fruits and vegetables
- Develop programs that allow farmers' markets to accept EBT debit cards or coupons for purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables

ACCESSIBILITY

- Increase the supply of and shelf space dedicated for high-quality, affordable fruits and vegetables at existing stores
- Improve public transportation to stores or influence business owners to provide transportation for customers
- Establish policies that encourage development or improvement of stores in food deserts that will provide more access to healthy foods

