

Multnomah County Increases Healthy Food Options in East Portland Neighborhood

Amy Gredler

At A Glance

As of December 2015, about 2,000 residents in Multnomah County, Oregon, have increased access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables close to home. Multnomah County Health Department and Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon have partnered to expand healthy retail programs in low-income communities where access to healthy foods is limited. As a result, El Porvenir Mini Market, a corner store in east Portland, now stocks more fresh fruits and vegetables. The market also offers food demonstrations to encourage consumers to buy and eat fresh produce.



Public Health Challenge

Almost 35% of African Americans and 33.4% of Latinos in Multnomah County are obese. In east Portland, where El Porvenir Mini Market is located, access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables is limited. The nearest full-service grocery store is more than a mile away from El Porvenir and access to public transportation can be limited, especially on evenings and weekends when many people must do their shopping. In addition, 34.2% of residents served by

the corner store live below the national poverty line. By making affordable, healthy, and culturally-inclusive food options more convenient, El Porvenir Mini Market, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO), and the Multnomah County Health Department (MCHD) are helping east Portland residents access the healthy foods they need to reduce their risk of obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and other chronic diseases.

Find Out More

Want to see fresh and healthy foods in local corner stores? Local businesses want to offer customers items they will buy. Residents are encouraged to talk to store owners and ask for fresh fruits and vegetables to be sold there. Continue to remind local store owners that having access to healthy food options is important. Learn more about Multnomah County's REACH and healthy retail initiatives at multco.us/reach. This project is supported by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) cooperative agreement.

It's very important, especially in this area where most of the people (live in low-income communities). They're just happy we carry some of their needs. I wish we had enough room to bring more.

- Federico Villalobos, Owner of El Porvenir Mini Market

Contact

Amy Gredler

Multnomah County Health
Department
426 SW Stark, 1st floor

Portland, OR 97204
Phone: 503-988-3674

Approach

MCHD and EMO partnered to set up healthy retail programs in east Portland, where families depend on corner stores like El Porvenir to fill gaps between difficult and lengthy trips to full-service grocery stores. The initiative, funded in part by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, aims to increase access to fresh, affordable produce. Community health workers provided tools, resources, and outreach activities to help expand and promote healthy food options in the store. Strategies included placing fresh cut fruits near the checkout counter, adding colorful signs about fresh produce, and hosting cooking demonstrations for customers to learn how to best use the produce.

Results

MCHD and community partners led efforts that resulted in El Porvenir increasing healthy food options for more than 2,000 residents. The store now stocks baskets of apples, bananas, oranges, and coconuts. Colorful signs spotlight weekly healthy food specials, and food demonstrations offer residents a fun way to learn more about cooking healthy. El Porvenir's owner, a native of Mexico, found that quite a few products attractive to his Latino customers were sometimes unfamiliar to customers of other racial or ethnic backgrounds. To address this concern, the store's first food demonstration crossed the cultural divide and showed customers how to make fresh guacamole from items found in the store. Some customers tasted guacamole for the first time. El Porvenir also offers sweet potatoes, squash, tomatoes, lettuce, and other seasonal produce.

What's Next

The Healthy Retail project continues to expand to additional corner stores in more neighborhoods. Project partners will continue to do community outreach and to develop innovative ideas to get customers into the stores and to buy and consume healthy foods. Some ideas include: increasing food demonstrations; offering coupon specials to buy produce using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits; and hosting "Healthy Hour" after school events to encourage kids to make healthy snack choices. The El Porvenir model is being expanded to seven corner stores in other high-need areas of Multnomah County. These changes will potentially benefit thousands of residents who live within easy walking distance (¼ mile) of the stores.