

Denver **Healthy Food Access** Initiative



The Denver Healthy People Program (DHP) of the Denver Department of Environmental Health is pleased to announce a new partnership with The Food Trust, funded by the Colorado Health Foundation, to find innovative ways for encouraging healthy food retail development in Denver. The goal is to eliminate “food deserts” and increase access to grocery stores for all of Denver’s residents. The effort will be based on successes across the country that have been led by The Food Trust.

The Healthy Food Initiative will establish the Denver Healthy Food Stakeholder’s Group, a team of leaders representing grocery retail, city departments and community organizations which will develop a set of policy recommendations designed to create a positive environment for supermarket development in needed areas of Denver. It will then facilitate implementation of policy recommendations via multi-sector collaboration.

This grant grew out of DHP efforts in Park Hill through its Park Hill Thriving Communities program and from work in other neighborhoods of North Denver, where community members advocated for closer grocery stores. The Initiative will work with North Denver communities to support these efforts over the next three years.

Obesity has severe health consequences: diabetes, heart disease, depression, diet related deaths. Indeed, the National Institutes of Medicine reports that the children of today may be the first generation to have a shorter life-span than their parents. In 2006 only 45% of Denver’s adults were at a healthy body weight. While Colorado and Denver fare better than the rest of the Nation, our rates would have been considered average just ten years ago.

Environmental factors play a key role in the obesity epidemic. Generally, people who have access to supermarkets tend to have healthier diets and lower rates of chronic illness. If people can’t access healthy food, they’re probably not going to eat it! Research indicates that low-income communities have fewer supermarkets than higher income areas. This lack of access to healthy food options results in higher obesity rates. Denver also has these ‘food deserts’, where affordable, healthy options are scarce. Increasing the number of supermarkets in areas where they are currently unavailable is a way to increase access to healthy foods, particularly for economically disadvantaged populations. According to a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Public Health study, fruit and vegetable consumption increased by 32 percent for each additional supermarket built in underserved communities with high African American populations.

Building grocery stores not only promotes healthier eating, but also offers economic benefits by creating jobs in our neediest neighborhoods. Through its Fresh Food Financing Initiative, Pennsylvania opened 78 new stores, resulting in 3700 permanent, new jobs.

All of Denver’s residents should have access to affordable, health food. The city is committed to supporting healthy food retail expansion for not only the health benefits, but from an economic standpoint.



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