

POSITION STATEMENT:

# Provide Funding for Incentive Programs to Expand Healthy Food Offerings in SNAP-Authorized Small Food Stores

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## SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Society of Behavioral Medicine supports the funding of incentive programs for SNAP-authorized 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.<sup>1,2,3</sup> 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.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup>
- Low-income communities often have a large number of small food stores (e.g., dollar stores, corner stores, gas stations, liquor stores).<sup>4</sup> Because small food stores often carry few staple food items, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, low-income communities often have high availability of calorie dense foods such as salty snacks, candy, and sugary beverages.<sup>8,9,10</sup> The overall healthfulness of customer purchases in small food stores has been linked to the types of foods and beverages stocked and promoted.<sup>11,12</sup>
- Since many small food stores in low-income communities accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits,<sup>9,13,14</sup> 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 U.S.<sup>13-21</sup>
- To increase healthy food offerings in SNAP-authorized small food stores, programs must be established to help storeowners overcome key barriers to healthy food retail expansion.<sup>22-26</sup> The lack of technical assistance, educational support, and store infrastructure (i.e., space and refrigeration) needed to stock, maintain, and mar-

ket healthy food to the community<sup>22,23,24</sup> often deter storeowners from offering more healthy foods. Storeowners' attitudes and cooperation are critical factors to consider when implementing strategies that expand healthy food retail in small food stores.<sup>25,26</sup> Furthermore, small food storeowners' often express a willingness to stock more healthy food options if it is profitable.<sup>22,23,25</sup>

## 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.<sup>9,14,27-34</sup>

- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) attempted to strengthen the mandatory stocking requirements for all SNAP-authorized food stores in the U.S. 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.<sup>27-34</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>
  - Small food storeowners expressed concerns about the lack of funding and technical assistance offered to support their compliance to this rule change.<sup>30,31</sup> No plans to address these concerns or revisit the stocking requirements for SNAP-authorized food stores were included in the Agricultural Act of 2018.<sup>33</sup>

- 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.<sup>34,35,36</sup> 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 1) supporting the development of new grocery stores and supermarkets or 2) providing one-time small grants to small food stores.<sup>34,35,36</sup>
- 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.<sup>36</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide seed grants to storeowners to develop or reconfigure store infrastructure (e.g., refrigeration, shelving) to expand and promote healthy food offerings.
- Offer storeowners 1) technical assistance to approve their ability to manage the equipment needed to track and sustain their healthy food supply and 2) educational materials on marketing strategies for promoting their healthy food items to the community (e.g., signage, sampling, point-of-purchase promotions).
- Give a tax break to SNAP-authorized small food stores in low-income communities that maintain a pre-determined minimum stock of USDA-recognized staple foods.

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## ENDORSEMENTS



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