

Governor Phil Murphy

ICYMI: NJ Health Department Funding Expansion of Healthy Corner Store Initiative

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TRENTON - The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) is expanding the Healthy Corner Store Initiative, which is aimed at increasing the availability and awareness of nutritious food and beverage options in neighborhood corner stores in underserved communities, particularly benefiting patrons eligible for SNAP and WIC benefits. The Department is making \$1.75 million available across stores statewide and is investing \$250,000 towards stores in Atlantic City, which is currently a leading food desert.

The Healthy Corner Store Initiative, spearheaded by the SNAP Education (SNAP-Ed) unit in NJDOH's Division of Family Health Services in collaboration with The Food Trust in New Jersey, works to respond to food access disparities observed in lower-income communities. The lack of healthy food choices in these neighborhoods hinders residents' ability to maintain a balanced diet as well as significantly impacts their overall well-being and risks of experiencing chronic diseases like obesity, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.

The expansion is expected to benefit about 150 stores, and will provide funding for items such as refrigeration and freezers to help with stocking fresh food items as well as educational opportunities for store owners. The statewide program aims to prioritize food deserts and is encouraging interested small stores and bodegas to apply, particularly if they serve residents receiving WIC or SNAP benefits. Stores interested in participating can email snap-edfhs@doh.nj.gov (<mailto:snap-edfhs@doh.nj.gov>). Funding will be awarded on a rolling basis.

"Ensuring every resident has access to nutritious food is an important part of our ongoing efforts through Nurture NJ to promote the health and well-being of families throughout New Jersey," **said First Lady Tammy Murphy**. "By expanding the Healthy Corner Store Initiative, we will make it easier for countless parents to provide their children with the high-quality food they need to grow and thrive."

"In the coming year, the New Jersey Department of Health is prepared to designate some 150 stores as Healthy Corner Stores, improving access to healthy foods where they are needed most," **said Acting Commissioner Kaitlan Baston**. "This initiative further advances our commitment to ending health disparities by increasing the availability of nutritious, affordable food in places that historically have been under-resourced."

The Initiative, funded under the Fiscal Year 2024 budget, has three principal objectives:

- **Enhancing healthy food accessibility:** The primary goal of the initiative is to improve access to nutritious foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, by bolstering the infrastructural capabilities of corner stores with essential resources like refrigeration and freezers to facilitate the effective stocking of healthy products.
- **Empowerment through training and technical assistance:** Store owners will receive comprehensive training and technical support to increase the retail availability and profitability of offering healthier dietary choices.
- **Fostering community partnerships:** By forging robust connections between store owners, local agriculturalists, and fresh food suppliers, the initiative aims to create a statewide network all working in sync to improve food accessibility.

In FY22, SNAP-Ed recruited and worked with 50 corner stores in the state serving 127,617 individuals who accessed these stores for fresh fruits and vegetables.

“Ensuring food security, especially to patrons eligible for SNAP and WIC benefits, is about more than just providing food. It’s also about creating better community resources and decreasing the burden of access to healthy food,” **said Mark Dinglasan, Director of the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate.** “The Healthy Corner Store Initiative can help stores transform into healthy community resources that are more accessible to parents, caregivers, and families. I applaud this initiative and OFSA stands ready to support NJDOH and the SNAP-Ed unit in this effort.”

Governor Phil Murphy

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