

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Commits Over \$5.5M to Strengthen Food Access in Atlantic City

11/14/2023

Innovative programs will expand access to fresh groceries for residents in NJ's second-most-acute food desert community

TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today announced that the [New Jersey Economic Development Authority \(NJEDA\)](https://www.njeda.gov/) will commit over \$5.5 million in funding to support a multi-faceted approach to immediately expand access to fresh, healthy grocery shopping options for Atlantic City residents. Out of 50 [Food Desert Communities \(FDCs\)](https://www.njeda.gov/njeda-board-approves-nj-food-desert-communities-designations-list/) in the state, Atlantic City is the second-highest-ranked, demonstrating a significant need for interventions designed to reduce rates of food insecurity. The suite of programs that will be launched by the NJEDA will increase affordable access to produce and healthy food options, ensuring more residents of Atlantic City can purchase groceries right in their community.

“Every New Jerseyan deserves equitable access to affordable groceries regardless of their zip code,” said **Governor Murphy**. “The funding announced today will support several innovative programs that will alleviate the pressure on countless Atlantic City residents who travel miles out of their community to buy the groceries they need for their families. My administration continues to be committed to expanding access to fresh and healthy foods in Atlantic City and across the state.”

In 2022, the NJEDA designated 50 FDCs across New Jersey. The Atlantic City/Ventnor FDC, comprised of 41,000 residents, is ranked second-highest in the state based on its food desert factor score, a measure of acuity of need. Atlantic City has been without a full-service supermarket for nearly two decades. The programs announced today will serve as pilot programs, which could be expanded to other FDCs throughout the state.

“Through my Nurture NJ initiative, New Jersey is working hard to strengthen underserved communities so that every child has a supportive and healthy environment to grow up in,” said **First Lady Tammy Murphy**. “I am excited that a portion of today’s funding will allow the Department of Health to expand their Healthy Corner Store Initiative in Atlantic City. The initiative has already brought healthy food and beverage choices to communities across the state and this additional funding will allow hardworking families struggling to make ends meet access the groceries they need to feed their households.”

“Every New Jerseyan deserves access to affordable groceries and nutritious foods regardless of where they live,” said **Senator Vince Polistina**. “This multimillion-dollar investment by the NJEDA will significantly improve food security in Atlantic City, help end food inequality, and expand access to disadvantaged communities across Atlantic County.”

“The residents of the Great City of Atlantic City deserve easy access to quality and nutritious foods right here in their hometown,” said **City of Atlantic City Mayor Marty Small, Sr.** “As my administration continues our quest to combat food insecurity issues, we are extremely grateful Governor Murphy, the First Lady, and the NJEDA recognize this glaring need exists in our city and are committed to ensuring our families do not struggle to put fresh food on the table.”

“For far too long, Atlantic City families have had limited options to buy fresh groceries. Under Governor Murphy and First Lady Murphy’s leadership, New Jersey is taking concrete steps to ensure every resident has access to convenient, affordable, and healthy grocery options,” said **NJEDA Chief Executive Officer Tim Sullivan**. “The innovative programs the NJEDA is supporting will strengthen food security in Atlantic City, creating stronger, healthier families and a more prosperous community. I appreciate the commitment of our state and local partners and look forward to working with them as we bring these new, creative ideas to Atlantic City.”

The NJEDA will sponsor initiatives led by two major healthcare systems in South Jersey to expand mobile and community-based food retail options, bringing fresh and affordable foods directly into Atlantic City communities. AtlantiCare is a South Jersey-based healthcare system which has long been addressing food insecurity by operating the Pantry in the Plex in Midtown from which it serves hundreds of local families on a weekly basis. With this sponsorship, AtlantiCare is able to further expand its food programming to include a retail mobile grocery. AtlantiCare will implement a multi-pronged approach including a weekly market and educational event featuring health education, incentives for purchasing healthy items, cooking demonstrations and classes, and assistance with online ordering. Combined, these efforts will support access to healthy food as well as teach community members about meal planning, preparation, and more.

NJEDA's sponsorship with Virtua Health will allow the South Jersey-based healthcare system to bring their "[Eat Well](https://www.virtua.org/about/eat-well)" mobile grocery store to Atlantic City, in addition to Virtua's core operations in Burlington and Camden counties. Virtua's mobile grocery store, which is a 40-foot refurbished New Jersey Transit bus, will allow Atlantic City residents to shop twice a week for fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh and frozen meat, dairy, eggs, and other basic grocery staples below-market prices.

The NJEDA will also launch the new \$5.25 million [Atlantic City Food Security Grants Pilot Program](https://www.njeda.gov/atlantic-city-food-security-grants-pilot-program/) (<https://www.njeda.gov/atlantic-city-food-security-grants-pilot-program/>), which will provide grants ranging from \$50,000 to \$500,000 to fund projects to strengthen food security and food access in Atlantic City. Grants can be used for direct and indirect project costs. The pilot program, which the NJEDA Board approved in October, is meant to act as a more immediate response to the food access crisis in Atlantic City and to bring nutritious food options to the city as residents await the construction of a full-fledged supermarket, which can take years. The NJEDA is using American Rescue Plan Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds and general state funds to support the *Atlantic City Food Security Grants Pilot Program*.

The NJEDA Board also approved providing the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) up to \$250,000 to expand their [Healthy Corner Store Initiative](https://www.nj.gov/health/nutrition/#:~:text=Operated%20by%20The%20Food%20Trust,disease%20and%20stroke%20and%20diabetes.) (<https://www.nj.gov/health/nutrition/#:~:text=Operated%20by%20The%20Food%20Trust,disease%20and%20stroke%20and%20diabetes.>) for stores in Atlantic City. The Healthy Corner Store Initiative, which is part of First Lady Murphy's Nurture NJ food security initiative, works to improve access to healthy food and beverages in underserved communities, which often experience higher rates of chronic disease such as heart disease and diabetes.

In the coming months, the NJEDA plans to begin accepting applications for its [Food Desert Supermarket Tax Credit](https://www.njeda.gov/njeda-board-approves-food-desert-relief-tax-credit-program-rules-authorizes-tax-credit-sale/) (<https://www.njeda.gov/njeda-board-approves-food-desert-relief-tax-credit-program-rules-authorizes-tax-credit-sale/>) program, which features a Supermarket Financing Gap Tax Credit for the development or rehabilitation of new supermarkets in FDCs and a Supermarket Initial Operating Costs Tax Credit to support the first three years of operations for these supermarkets. The tax credits are expected to create a feasible, sustainable path forward for a long-awaited supermarket in Atlantic City.

The NJEDA launched the [Food Retail Innovation in Delivery Grant](https://www.njeda.gov/njeda-announces-new-grant-program-to-fight-food-insecurity-and-combat-food-deserts/) (<https://www.njeda.gov/njeda-announces-new-grant-program-to-fight-food-insecurity-and-combat-food-deserts/>) (FRIDG) program earlier this year, which helps food retailers to purchase and install temperature-controlled lockers to expand food delivery options for residents living in FDCs. Supermarket operators in the Atlantic City region are encouraged to apply for the FRIDG program, where recipients can receive up to \$250,000 to purchase the lockers.

"We are proud to partner with the Administration in our shared commitment to eliminating health disparities for our residents who are dealing with food insecurity and living in food deserts," said **Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Kaitlan Baston**. "By increasing access and availability to nutritious, affordable food, we are empowering residents to improve their own health."

"I commend Governor Murphy, the First Lady and the NJEDA for continuing to invest in innovative approaches to better serve New Jerseyans and solve persistent challenges. These initiatives will help achieve food and nutrition security by bringing affordable, healthy, and nutritious foods directly to Atlantic City communities that do not have access to local grocery stores or markets today," said **Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman**. "I also want to acknowledge the health care and community partners involved in these projects who recognize that regular access to healthy foods means healthier people and communities. Addressing barriers like transportation and affordability will make the difference for many families who right now have little to no access to healthy food options that are vital to their health."

"Atlantic City cannot reach its full potential without grocery shopping options that offer fresh produce and high-quality food to the people who live and work in the community," said **New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Acting Commissioner Jacquelyn Suárez**. "We understand that access to nutritious food will make a huge and positive impact on the health of people who live in Atlantic City, particularly the city's youth. It will also make the city more attractive to visitors and potential residents. We thank Governor Murphy, First Lady Murphy, and the NJEDA for their creative approach to addressing food insecurity in Atlantic City."

"The CRDA supports efforts for Atlantic City residents to have access to fresh and healthy food options," said **Casino Reinvestment Development Authority Executive Director Sean Pattwell**. "The Murphy administration is taking important steps that will ensure they have the options they need to achieve this goal."

"I applaud Governor Murphy and the NJEDA for deploying these trailblazing strategies to address food insecurity in Atlantic City," said **Mark Dinglasan, Executive Director of the NJ Office of the Food Security Advocate**. "The Atlantic City Food Security Grants Pilot Program is a holistic approach to supporting innovative strategies that can bring partners together to collectively address community needs in one of New Jersey's key cities. My team and I stand ready to support the NJEDA in whatever capacity as this program rolls out."

"The social determinants of health are barriers to the well-being of our entire community and AtlantiCare is excited to partner with Governor Murphy and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to address these underlying factors. Together, we can make a significant difference to those that need it most," said **Michael Charlton, president and CEO of AtlantiCare**. "This funding will not only enable us to expand our food security initiatives and education programs, but more importantly, it will help us to address the root causes of health disparities that are so prevalent in Atlantic City. The health of our community extends beyond our medical facility. I am committed to addressing these issues and am confident that with the support and involvement of our staff, patients, and local partners, we can create a healthier, more equitable community for everyone we serve."

"At Virtua Health, we view food as fundamental to health and wellness. Our Eat Well programs help ensure that South Jersey residents not only have access to fresh, affordable foods, but that they also receive guidance and support for embracing good nutrition as a lifestyle," said **Dennis W. Pullin, FACHE, president and CEO of Virtua Health**. *"We are honored to collaborate with Governor Murphy*

and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to bring Virtua's Eat Well Mobile Grocery Store to Atlantic City and explore new opportunities for food access."

Governor Phil Murphy

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