

Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity

New York

Policy and environmental change to increase access and consumption of fruits and vegetables

Public Health Problem

According to BRFSS data, in 2006, 60% of adults in New York State were overweight or obese. One of the principle target areas for reducing obesity is fruit and vegetable consumption. But data from 2005 showed 74% of state residents consumed less than 5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily. The program was designed to target lower income populations who typically eat fewer fruits and vegetable than higher income residents.

Intervention Example

New York State has 2,500 emergency food relief organizations, including 1,800 pantries, 435 soup kitchens and more than 255 emergency shelters. The Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) provides grants to those sites for the purchase of food. In 2006, New York instituted a policy that required all contractors who provide food through HPNAP to spend at least 5% of food funds on fresh produce for distribution. In 2007, that requirement has been increased to 10%. To support the policy, the *Just Say Yes* program, designed to increase produce consumption by food stamp recipients, conducts nutrition education sessions and cooking demonstrations using the fruit and vegetables available at the site. Because many of the sites had inadequate space for nutrition education, the program purchased a mobile vehicle with a fully equipped kitchen. The vehicle is used at outside sessions. In summer 2008, the group piloted new educational sessions at summer feeding sites; based on feedback from the parents, this program has been modified and be expanded in the next year.

Implications and Impact

Working in 406 organizations, the staff reached 12,993 clients in 2006 with *Just Say Yes*. In a post-test at the end of educational sessions, 76% of participants indicated that they had intended to increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables at home. During the past year, 20% of the food budget was spent on produce (the policy required 10%). The policy required that \$1.2 million be spent, but \$2.6 was actually spent.

The success of this intervention is attributed to several key steps:

- *Achieving buy-in early.* A policy was established to convene a steering committee of food bank representatives and nutritionists to solicit their input and involvement.
- *Marketing the program to food pantry operators.* Food pantry operators have a trust relationship with the clients, and were important partners in encouraging participation in cooking classes.
- *Establishing adequate space.* Obesity Prevention Program staff assessed facilities and provided assistance in identifying space for education sessions.
- *Developing strategies for proper produce storage.* Strategies included: targeting funds for the purchase of refrigerators, changing delivery schedules, and marketing the delivery schedule so that individuals come the same day that produce is delivered in order to decrease the need for storage.