

ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN BROOKLYN PARK

Findings from Listening Sessions and Surveys

Background

The Anne Arundel County Department of Health and its community partners — Chesapeake Center for Youth Development, Iglesia Cristiana De Restauración, Partnership for Children, Youth and Family, Restoration Community Development Corporation —

conducted four listening sessions with 47 Brooklyn Park residents to better understand the community's unique assets, needs, and desires related to access to healthy food and facilities for physical activity. These listening sessions informed a survey that further

assessed residents' food and physical activity issues. The community partners gathered 387 surveys. Listening sessions and surveys were conducted in English and Spanish in Summer 2017. Themes from the listening sessions and the survey are featured in this brief.

Listening Sessions

Cost: The main concern around food access was the high price of fresh fruits and vegetables. In response, some residents with cars reported traveling to various stores to find the lowest prices and others purchased cheap and filling, but not nutritious foods. The few participants who were aware of the farmers' market perceived it as too expensive. Participants were also concerned about the cost of using recreational facilities and participating in children's organized sports.

Time: Shopping and eating practices were impacted by when resources were available, especially for residents who use programs like SNAP and

WIC; such residents reported purchasing healthier foods (produce, meat) when they first receive benefits and then relying on processed foods later in the month. Time constraints on physical activity included distance to the gym, family obligations, lack of childcare, work hours, fatigue and disinterest in leaving again once returned home for the evening.

Preference and habits: Latino residents indicated a desire for stores with culturally appropriate foods. African American participants wanted a better store to purchase fresh fish. A few parents mentioned not being able to eat fresh fruit they bring home because their

children eat them, while others noted that their children were picky eaters. Parents supported serving healthy and culturally appropriate foods in schools.

Physical Environment: Most participants shopped at grocery stores outside of Brooklyn Park and used cars to get there. Residents without cars spent more money on food, because taking a bus to the store required residents to purchase food in smaller amounts and more frequently. Residents also expressed dissatisfaction with the quality and variety of food in some stores and the quality of recreational facilities. Residents were unhappy about the lack of sidewalks and the poor quality

(continued)

Physical Environment: (continued) of existing sidewalks. They hoped for the creation of a recreational facility, such as a YMCA. Many participants mentioned that there are often homeless people and people engaging in risky behaviors around the area. Parents feared allowing kids to play outside or in parks, and they feared being assaulted on the sidewalk, in parks and at bus stops.

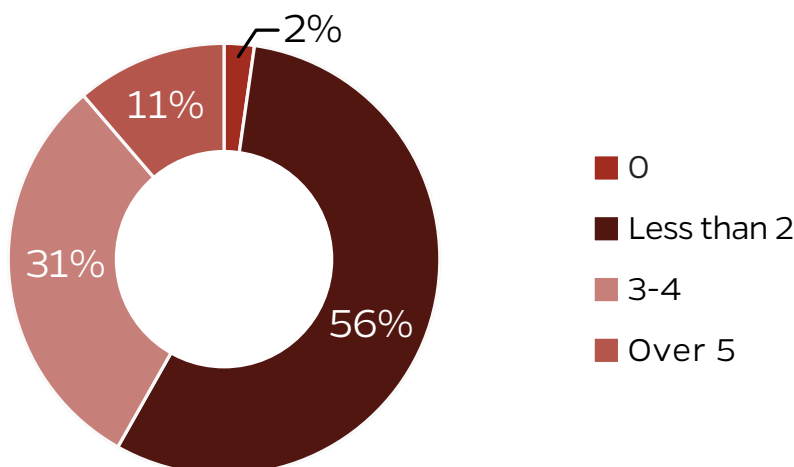
Knowledge of Resources: Many residents were not aware of community resources. They did not know about the school track and community walking groups, or the new farmers' market and its acceptance of federal nutrition assistance benefits. The Maryland Money Market program at the farmers' market provides up to \$5 per market day in matching dollars for produce to patrons who spend their SNAP, FMNP, or WIC FVP benefits at the market.

Survey

Shopping and Eating Habits

- Average number of servings of fruits and vegetables consumed per day: 2.7
- In a typical week, 35% of people surveyed ate meals made at home multiple times a day; 41% ate once a week at a sit-down restaurant; and 43% ate once a week at a fast-food/carry-out restaurant.
- 76% of respondents reported that they prepared meals in their household.
- In the last 12 months, 42% of respondents reported that their family had to cut the size of meals or skip meals because there was not enough money for food.
- Reasons preventing residents from eating healthily included cost (63%), lack of transportation to stores (46%), family preference (44%), preparation time (44%), and dislike for the taste of healthy food (42%).

Number of Fruit and Vegetable Servings Consumed Per Day



Demographics

387 participants

Gender:

Female (60%)
Male (40%)

Age in Years:

18-24 (9%)
25-40 (46%)
41-65 (35%)
over 65 (10%)

Race/Ethnicity:

Black (32%)
White (34%)
Hispanic (13%)

Federal Nutrition Assistance Enrollment:

SNAP (45%)
WIC (24%)

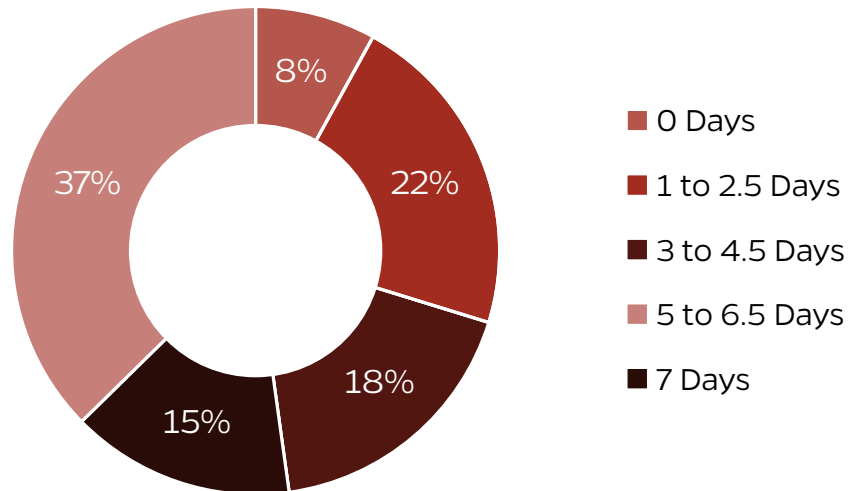
Health Conditions

Percent of respondents reporting to have someone in the household with the following health conditions:

- Cancer (10%)
- Diabetes (29%)
- Heart disease (10%)
- High blood pressure (35%)
- Overweight (28%)

69% of residents had at least one child in the household

Number of Days a Week Physically Active for >30 minutes



Transportation

To get to the store where they buy most of their food:

- 95% of respondents travel less than 30 minutes with 55% traveling less than 10 minutes.
- 56% travel by car, 23% walk and 12% borrow a car.

Store Environment

- The two most commonly reported stores where people did most of their food shopping were Shoppers Food Warehouse and Save A Lot in Brooklyn Park.
- Majority of respondents chose their primary food store because of low prices (65%) and convenience (63%).
- 55% of respondents reported that fresh fish is hard to find in Brooklyn Park; 49% reported having difficulty finding ethnic/international food. To a slightly less extent, respondents reported difficulty finding fresh vegetables (45%), fresh meat (43%) and fresh fruit (42%).

Physical Activity Habits

- More than half of respondents (52%) reported to be physically active for more than 30 minutes a day for over 5 days a week.
- Most common form of exercise was walking (45%).
- Respondents reported exercising at the park or along a trail or track at home or at a gym.

Environment for Physical Activity

- The majority of respondents reported a lack of time (61%), poor quality of facilities or programs (56%), not feeling safe in their neighborhood (55%) and cost (50%) as barriers to going to a park or recreation center.
- 52% of respondents don't feel safe walking in Brooklyn Park, primarily due to crime, drugs and alcohol, and lack of adequate police protection.
- 69% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there is a lot of trash and litter on the streets in Brooklyn Park.

Implications for Intervention and Policy

These foundational data helped to understand residents' key barriers in access to healthy food and physical activity. The following are additional considerations that can guide the intervention planning process.

Healthy Eating Solutions

When asked about what would help them eat more healthily, the top five responses selected were:

- A farmers' market nearby (83%)
- More healthy and fresh food items (fruits, vegetables, meat) at the food pantry (82%)
- Healthier options in local convenience stores (81%)
- Better selection of food at the supermarket (79%)
- Tips for eating healthy on a budget (78%)

Another 55.4% of respondents said that help with applications for food assistance programs would help them eat more healthily. Interventions will need to consider how to offset the cost of healthy food while addressing concerns of quality and preference, including children's reluctance to eat healthy food.

Solutions to Exercise More

While a lack of time was cited as the most common barrier to getting exercise, available facilities for physical activity and the surrounding environment also presented challenges. To encourage more physical activity:

- Increase awareness of the opportunities to be physically active in Brooklyn Park.
- Improve safety conditions where people walk and play.
- Provide ways to address litter in the streets.

Interventions will also need to consider the cost and quality of recreational facilities, such as affordable recreational programs or improved sidewalks.

Solutions to Raise Awareness

Knowledge of resources, such as awareness of acceptance of federal nutrition assistance benefits at farmers' markets, can be addressed by first asking:

- Are residents taking advantage of food assistance and physical activity programs?
- Are residents taking advantage of other neighborhood resources and what are those resources?
- How can we raise greater awareness and uptake of such services?
- How can we bridge the gap between awareness and provision of assistance?

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