

RAND Corporation Study Links New Supermarket to Improved Community Health

40 million Americans live in places without ready access to healthy, affordable food. In communities where there are no supermarkets or grocery stores, residents often have no choice but to shop wherever's close by: the big-box store, the bodega down the street or the gas station. Lack of grocery access goes hand in hand with health: Residents of "food deserts," especially in communities of color, are often also disproportionately affected by major health issues like obesity and diabetes. But with better access to nutritious, affordable food, shoppers across the country are empowered to make healthier choices.

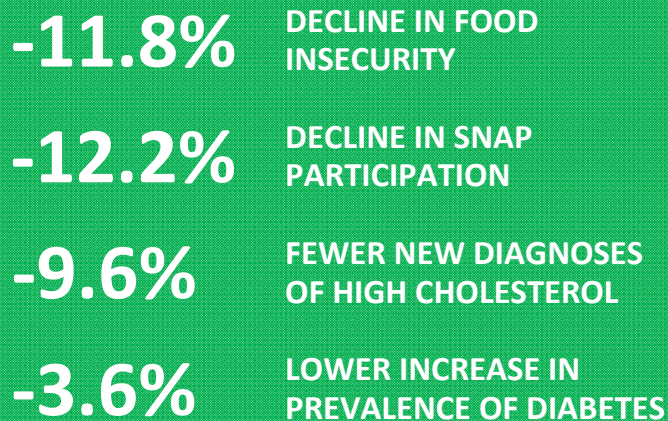
HFFI Makes a Difference

For 30 years, Pittsburgh's Hill District lacked a supermarket, that is, until the opening of a Shop 'n' Save in 2013 through a healthy food financing initiative (HFFI) program. A recently released study by RAND Corporation found that local residents experienced less food insecurity and fewer new cases of high cholesterol, arthritis and diabetes. The community also experienced lower food stamp participation and increased income.

Lack of grocery access goes hand in hand with health disparities.

RAND surveyed a randomly selected cohort in the Hill District neighborhood and a similar low-income neighborhood without a grocery store before and about one year following the opening of the supermarket. It tested changes across the two communities in residents' food security, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation, Special Supplemental Nutrition

Program for Women Infant and Children (SSNP-WIC) participation, employment, income and self-reported health/chronic disease diagnoses. Compared to residents of the neighborhood without a grocery store, residents of the Shop 'n' Save neighborhood exhibited a range of health and economic gains:



There was also suggestive evidence that residents' incomes increased (\$1,550) and fewer new diagnoses of arthritis (-7.4%). Since less than 1% of the community moved away from the neighborhood, these improvements can't be linked to gentrification.

Looking Forward

This study provides strong evidence that introducing a new supermarket to a previously underserved, low-income neighborhood improves local residents' economic well-being and health. The impact of these results should not be underestimated: Policymakers should consider broad impacts of neighborhood investment that could translate into improved health for residents of underserved neighborhoods.

**To read the RAND study abstract, visit [http://www.annalsofepidemiology.org/article/S1047-2797\(17\)30293-4/abstract](http://www.annalsofepidemiology.org/article/S1047-2797(17)30293-4/abstract)*



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