

LETTER: Stores can help fight obesity epidemic

12:33 p.m. EDT April 16, 2015



Last week, Consumer Reports released its annual survey for America's best supermarkets. Among the deciding factors was the supermarket's ability to provide a wide choice of fresh, healthy, unprocessed foods. However, far too many New Jerseyans live in communities like Camden, where there are no well-stocked grocery stores in their neighborhoods, leaving them unable to make healthy food choices.

In 2013, New Jersey was one of six states that saw a slight increase in adult obesity. The state's rate of obesity in toddlers residing in low-income communities is the second highest in the nation. In Camden alone, 40 percent of children are considered overweight and obese.

Small, neighborhood retailers can be part of the solution to obesity and diet-related disease. New Jersey's Healthy Corner Store Initiative and the Camden Healthy Corner Store Network are working with corner store owners to help stores stock, market and sell healthy, affordable food to their customers. In addition, signage and labels help residents choose more nutritious options.

These interventions are already showing promise in improving store offerings and increasing sales and consumption of healthier food.

Today, 38 stores participate and the goal is to expand the overall state initiative to more than 150 corner stores by year-end.

Now is the time for all of us to support the New Jersey Healthy Corner Store Initiative so underserved communities across the state can reap the health and economic benefits.

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