



ANCHOR

ACCELERATING NATIONAL COMMUNITY HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH REINFORCING PARTNERSHIPS

HEALTHY HARTFORD'S ADVISORY COMMISSION ON FOOD POLICY



Access to healthy food can be challenging in any environment, but particularly difficult for children, families and seniors living in impoverished areas of Hartford, Connecticut. That's when the cultivation of healthy foods, purchasing power, and community collaboration can make a difference – boosting the health of residents and visitors. Local community and organizational leaders have been working together to develop effective food strategies and to improve the food environment in Hartford.

The Challenge

Nearly 34 percent of Hartford residents are living in households with incomes below the Federal Poverty Level. Because 19 percent of the city's residents are children 5 to 17 years old, the health of Hartford's youth is of particular concern. A 2012 local preschool surveillance project showed that 37 percent of the 1,120 children measured were overweight or obese in Hartford. Four- to five-year-old children were more likely to be overweight or obese than younger enrollees in the early learning centers. In addition, many neighborhoods in Hartford meet the definition of a food desert; low-income areas without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. An example is the city's North End where supermarkets are non-existent and fast food outlets abound.



“I continue to be impressed with the leadership and work of the commission. Members are extremely dedicated to its cause and collaborate in efforts to ensure great outcomes.”

- Survey respondent

The Solution

Community residents and organizations are adding their voices, energy and support to make changes to increase access to healthy food. Grow Hartford is a program of the nonprofit Hartford Food System that provides youth leadership education and a working urban farm that produces thousands of pounds of local fresh produce. Hartford Food System collaborates with multiple farmers market sites across the city, including a new Hartford Mobile Market that makes stops in 11 neighborhoods. The markets offer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) and double-value coupon redemption for purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables by residents using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). These payment options make the markets more accessible to Hartford's low-income population. A weekly North End farmers market takes place in front of the North End Senior Center near the Burgdorf Health Center. The Hartford ANCHOR project is helping support and expand Hartford Food System's efforts. Together, the groups are raising awareness of these resources, which can make healthy food shopping and preparation an easier task for many residents.

Policy, System and Environmental Change

The Hartford ANCHOR project is also working with a city commission that is a key adviser to the mayor, city council and city departments on food system issues affecting residents. The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy represents more than 16 community organizations and residents dedicated to improving the availability of safe and nutritious food at reasonable prices for all residents, particularly those in need. The Hartford Food System, a nonprofit grassroots group, chairs the city commission and provides staff.

Sustaining Success

Education and teaching residents to grow and source their own food is a key to sustaining success. One recent example is the work of multiple organizations who collaborated to highlight gardening techniques and farmers markets. The Hartford Food System, along with the Hartford ANCHOR project, the Knox Park Foundation, the North End Farmers Market, and Hands On Hartford all invited community members to an art and music session at a local skateboard park. Attendees created artwork that is being transferred onto banners to explain the use of SNAP, WIC and double-value coupons at the markets.



Results

A recent survey conducted about the Hartford Advisory Commission's work and how to replicate success nationwide prompted several action steps:

- Develop a process for setting concrete action goals.
- Continue to develop a community engagement strategy.
- Develop a strategy for reaching out to key city agencies, commissions, boards, and departments.
- Revisit the city ordinance that established the commission in 1991.
- Share the results of the evaluation with other food policy commissions.

The Hartford ANCHOR project is helping move these action steps forward. The coalition is contributing in an array of ways: technical assistance; communication and outreach; strategic planning of healthy food financing initiatives; food and beverage procurement policies; and nutrition education and food assistance resources.

Get Involved

The commission meets every second Wednesday of the month from 3:30-5 pm in the basement meeting room of the Hartford Public Library. The public is welcomed and encouraged to attend. Over the next few months, the commission is planning a series of events to create more opportunities for dialogue and input to shape Hartford's food environment and food policies.