The Real Cost of a Healthy Diet

Boston results

Cost of TFP in four neighborhoods exceeds maximum food stamp benefit

Results are based on data collected in four stores in each of four Boston neighborhoods (16 stores total). The average monthly cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) was $752, 39% higher than the maximum monthly food stamp benefit for a family of four. On average, the TFP could not be purchased with the maximum food stamp benefit in any of the participating neighborhoods: the maximum benefit was sufficient to purchase the TFP in only two of sixteen surveyed stores. Families in Boston relying on small stores for their grocery needs pay the highest prices—nearly $800 according to our results.

Healthy items missing from grocery shelves

The TFP food list contains 104 items. On average, 16% of items were not available in participating Boston stores. The most commonly missing items were whole wheat products, such as bread, cereal, rice, and pasta. Low-fat dairy products and lean meats were also seldom available. Boston stores quite frequently offered fresh fruits and vegetables but the quality was often poor, especially in small stores.
Boston resources

Partner and advocacy organizations

The Food Project, Dorchester
Mission: To grow a thoughtful and productive community of youth and adults from diverse backgrounds who work together to build a sustainable food system.
Website: www.thefoodproject.org

Project Bread, East Boston
Mission: To alleviate, prevent, and ultimately end hunger in Massachusetts.
Website: www.projectbread.org

Project Right, Inc., Grove Hall
Mission: To strengthen and coordinate existing services and programs for our community through grassroots organizing of neighborhood residents.
Website: www.projectright.org

Hyde Square Task Force, Jamaica Plain
Mission: To develop the skills of youth and their families so that they are empowered to enhance their own lives and build a strong and vibrant urban community.
Website: www.hydesquare.org

Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition
Mission: To draw on the wonderful ethnic and cultural diversity of the Mattapan community to promote a healthy living environment, with a focus on access to healthy foods and the promotion of physical fitness for all ages.

New England Regional Anti Hunger Network (NERAHN)
Mission: To reduce hunger by maximizing resources through collaborative efforts; and to work collectively to design and implement action on state, regional, and national levels.
Website: www.nerahn.org

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute/ Food Stamp Improvement Coalition
Mission: To reduce hunger by maximizing resources through collaborative efforts; and to work collectively to design and implement action on state, regional, and national levels.
Website: http://mlri.org

Boston Collaborative for Food and Fitness
Mission: To improve community health through a comprehensive initiative addressing issues related to food and fitness. The Collaborative is comprised of dynamic individuals representing a diverse group of sectors, including healthcare, government, education, youth development, food systems, social services, and residents.
Websites:
http://www.masspreventioncenter.org/
Food_and_Fitness/food_and_fitness.html
http://www.wkkf.org/default.aspx?
tabid=75&CID=383&NID=61&LanguageID=0

Local policy actions

Promote policies to implement or reward local food system improvements. Models for expanding access to healthy food in low-income communities exist and could be replicated elsewhere with government support. Boston-based examples include:
- Boston Collaborative for Food and Fitness, a citywide coalition that aims to improve access to local, healthy, affordable food;
- Equipping farmers' markets with wireless EBT (electronic benefit transfer) card readers, which can improve access to local fruits and vegetables in communities with limited fresh food options; and
- The Boston Bounty Bucks program, which doubles food stamp dollars when people spend between $5 and $10 on their EBT card at participating farmers' markets.

Neighborhood profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Roxbury*</th>
<th>Jamaica Plain**</th>
<th>Mattapan</th>
<th>East Boston</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (2000)</td>
<td>55,663</td>
<td>38,074</td>
<td>37,371</td>
<td>38,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>36,454</td>
<td>6,842</td>
<td>30,182</td>
<td>1,375</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13,955</td>
<td>8,642</td>
<td>4,573</td>
<td>14,970</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>2,520</td>
<td>19,369</td>
<td>1,236</td>
<td>19,104</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poverty Rate</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$27,133</td>
<td>$41,524</td>
<td>$32,748</td>
<td>$31,311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Grove Hall is located in Roxbury, **Hyde Square is located in Jamaica Plain