

Check it Out, A Healthy Checkout!

John Yauch

At A Glance

Residents of West Virginia's Mid-Ohio Valley area had the highest combined rate of obesity and overweight in the country in 2011 at 68.9%. A lack of access to healthy foods played a major role in this statistic. To combat this health issue, Mid-Ohio Valley worked with local grocery stores to establish healthy checkout aisles. Strong partnerships with grocers helped to make this initiative a success, and positive customer feedback fueled the continuation and spread of the program.

Public Health Challenge

Most people who buy products at a grocery store must go through a checkout lane, and the options presented in these lanes (candy bars, potato chips, and sugar-sweetened beverages) are usually not healthy. Previously, there were no grocery stores offering checkout aisles with healthy foods and beverages—a major issue given Mid-Ohio Valley's 33% adult obesity rate and limited access to healthy foods. Unhealthy items in checkout lanes primarily attract children, and with a higher than average childhood obesity rate of 35.5% in West Virginia, checkout lanes were a particular concern.



Find Out More

Mid-Ohio Valley's goal is to change food environments across the region to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Creating healthy checkout aisles is a smart solution. Strong partnerships need to be created for such an initiative to be successful. For more information about how to develop healthy checkout aisles in your community, email changethefuturewv@gmail.com.

Approach

Now, when customers check out at selected grocery stores in the Mid-Ohio Valley in West Virginia, they have the option to visit a checkout lane offering healthy options. Several stores partnered with Change the Future WV and signed a Healthy Checkout Aisle Agreement, which lists suggestions for aisle items such as bottled water, fruits and vegetables, granola bars, sunscreen, jump ropes, and other toys that promote physical activity. Several of the stores are located in low-income areas and specific strategies were developed to reach residents in this demographic. The Healthy Checkout Aisle Initiative has increased access to healthy items for Mid-Ohio Valley residents.

Results

Currently, eight grocery stores in the Mid-Ohio Valley have implemented healthy checkout aisles: three Walmarts and five Foodlands. Because of their success and positive publicity, seven other smaller grocery chains and independently owned grocers have also implemented healthy checkout aisles. Feedback has been positive from both the stores and customers. Community members, especially parents, comment how much they love seeing increased healthy options at their grocery stores. The stores report that healthy items featured in the checkout aisles are popular and often need to be restocked throughout the day. Customers enjoy having the option of checking out in an aisle where healthy products are available, instead of chips and candy.

Contact

John Yauch

WV Bureau for Public Health
350 Capitol St. Room 514

Charleston, WV 25301
Phone: 304-356-4193

"I have asked customers, 'Why are you in this line?' And typically, it's a mom with a child, and they kind of grin and say, 'Because I really like what options there are—and aren't—in this checkout.'" - Elizabeth Nagel, Walmart Merchandise Manager

- Elizabeth Nagel

What's Next

The Healthy Checkout Aisle Initiative is spreading throughout the state. Walmart has implemented healthy checkout aisles in seven additional stores in West Virginia. West Virginia also has provided assistance with healthy checkout aisles to communities in Wisconsin, Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, Indiana, Nebraska, Alabama, South Carolina, and Nova Scotia, Canada.