

Building Healthy Communities: Healthy Navajo Stores Initiative Toolkit Training

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"When participants were asked if they felt confident in approaching a store to begin initial outreach for the program, many responded 'At ease' and 'Yes, with help [of this] booklet info and today's discussions.'"

Healthy Navajo Stores Initiative Toolkit Training Participants

Summary

Community Outreach and Patient Empowerment (COPE) is a Native-controlled non-profit that strives to empower Native communities to achieve health and wellbeing. COPE's Food Access team has created a step-by-step toolkit to increase access to fresh fruits, vegetables, and traditional foods across Navajo Nation. The toolkit seeks to provide a platform for Navajo stores to sustainably supply their communities with healthy and traditional food. The toolkit is based on the philosophy that "Food is Medicine" — healthy food is key to healthy living.

Challenge

Murals of Navajo ancestors painted on the storefront of Teec Nos Pos Trading Post greet community members as they are drawn through the front door by a cooler brimming with strawberries, squash, mangoes, peppers, grapefruit, and avocados. But, this experience walking into convenience stores throughout Navajo Nation is an exception, not the norm. Shelves stocked with junk food and fridges full of soda are typical sights walking into a convenience store on Navajo Nation. Changing this isn't easy. Selling more fruits and vegetables means that store managers must know how to handle, store, and market fresh produce. It's also risky: stores wonder if their customers will even buy fresh fruits and vegetables before they go bad.

Solution

COPE's Healthy Navajo Stores Initiative supports local store and community partnerships to sustainably supply Navajo communities with fresh fruits and vegetables. The toolkit is developed to empower Navajo communities and stores to make healthy changes.

The first step focuses on building positive relationships with store managers. Community leaders can then work with stores to market produce and encourage customers to make healthy choices. The toolkit offers ideas such as placing baskets of apples and oranges at cash registers to prompt customers to choose fruit as a cheap snack. Stores can also create a "health zone" where customers stock up on healthy foods in addition to produce.

Your Involvement is Key

"Community support is essential to the success of the Healthy Navajo Stores Initiative. When a surrounding community feels involved in and proud of their Healthy Navajo Store, they are more likely to support and encourage the store partner in making healthy changes." — Healthy Navajo Stores Initiative Toolkit

Ways to promote your store include hosting cooking competitions of dishes cooked with the store's produce or volunteer parties to help stores create displays promoting their new produce.

Results

COPE's latest toolkit training took place on June 24, 2016 with diverse participants, including Tribal Food Access Navigators, the Vendor Management Coordinator for Navajo Nation WIC Nutrition Program, members of the Diné Community Advocacy Alliance and the Navajo County Public Health Services District. Now as Store Outreach partners, these trainees are empowered to build cross-sector collaborations and engage local stores in the Healthy Navajo Stores Initiative.

Participants hailed the toolkit as a helpful guide to propose creative strategies and technical assistance to stores to increase the supply and sale of healthy foods. The most important feedback from participants was their excitement to learn from each other's experiences. The process of community collaboration towards developing Healthy Navajo Stores is growing and maturing.

Sustainable Success

With COPE's support, store and community partners create a "Store Collaboration Plan" to outline the steps to becoming a Healthy Navajo Store. This plan helps identify necessary supports, time frames, as well as stores' motivations, weaknesses and strengths to make these changes.

"Healthy foods, including fresh produce and traditional Diné foods, are important for maintaining life-long health, avoiding chronic diseases, and allowing customers to be their best selves. Fruits and vegetables are both high in vitamins, minerals, and fiber, and low in calories and fat. Traditional Diné foods contain similarly important nutrients and have kept the Diné people healthy and resilient for generations." — Healthy Navajo Stores Initiative Toolkit

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