



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 24, 2015

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## **Seventy Percent of North Carolina Voters Support Funding a Healthy Corner Store Initiative to Improve Access to Healthy Food**

*Unhealthy Eating and Obesity Viewed as Most Serious Health  
Problem Facing Children Growing Up in the United States Today*

**Winston-Salem (February 24, 2015)** – A new statewide survey released today shows that North Carolina registered voters (70 percent) support the creation of a Healthy Corner Store Initiative as a way of tackling the state's childhood obesity epidemic. Additionally, a similar majority says that state and local governments should provide training and incentives to encourage neighborhood stores, where people often shop for groceries, to stock healthy foods.

"According to this poll, North Carolinians view unhealthy eating and childhood obesity as the most serious problems facing children in the United States, above physical activity, quality of education, and children not spending enough time outdoors," said Sarah Jacobson, Healthy Food Access Coordinator for the North Carolina Alliance for Health (NCAH). "This clearly demonstrates that it is time to stop talking about this issue and start doing something about it," she said.

"Programs such as a Healthy Corner Store Initiative and Healthy Food Financing improve availability, affordability and accessibility of healthy foods at food retailers within areas of poor food access. This approach would not only remove a barrier to healthy eating, but also create new business opportunities. If the focus also includes healthy foods grown and/or produced in North Carolina, the state could realize a triple win in terms of health, economic growth and community revitalization," said Jacobson.

The poll, which was released at a news conference at La Comercial, a healthy corner store on Waughtown Street in Winston-Salem, was funded by the American Heart Association.

The poll also found:

- More than 90 percent of registered North Carolina voters recognize childhood obesity and unhealthy eating as a serious problem
- Seventy-six percent of registered North Carolina voters favor state and local governments providing training and incentives to encourage corner store owners to stock and sell more healthy foods and beverages
- One half (50 percent) of registered voters view access to grocery stores in low to moderate income areas in both urban and rural communities as a serious or somewhat serious problem
- The fact that healthy foods are not affordable was identified as the most significant

- barrier to improving access to healthy foods in both urban and rural areas
- Lack of nutritional education and poor economic conditions were identified as significant barriers to healthy eating

Diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, certain kinds of cancer, obesity and diet-related diseases disproportionately impact communities without access to healthy foods. People living in such communities—known as food deserts—often shop for food at corner stores, which commonly sell highly processed foods that are high in fat and low in nutrients. In fact, youth who live near convenience stores have higher Body Mass Indices (BMIs) and consume more sugary drinks than their peers who live closer to full-service grocery stores. Additionally, one study published in *Pediatrics* showed that more than 40 percent of elementary school students shopped at a corner store twice daily, often purchasing chips, candy, and soda.

“Because youth who live in food deserts often shop for food in corner stores, it is extremely important that these retail outlets offer healthy food options,” said NCAH Executive Director Pam Seamans. “The Healthy Corner Store Initiative would do just that by providing corner stores with technical assistance and expertise in stocking and selling fresh fruits and vegetables. Decreases in chronic disease and obesity can be linked to increased consumption of fruits and vegetables. The Healthy Corner Store Initiative has the potential to decrease the percentage of youth that are overweight, obese, or are suffering from chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes,” Seamans said.

“Several barriers prevent small store owners from stocking and selling healthy and local foods,” Jacobson explained. “Owners face a grower-retailer gap that can make finding local produce to sell at affordable prices very difficult. Further, these stores have small square footage with limited shelving and refrigeration, which can make it difficult for them to expand their inventory or stock perishable items. Many store owners do not have the time or resources to invest in store upgrades and are not aware of financing options. The Healthy Corner Store Initiative can help lower these barriers,” she said.

“I was particularly pleased that once those being polled learned more about the Healthy Corner Store Initiative, the support level jumped to 76 percent. This clearly shows North Carolinians are ready for action,” said Jacobson.

“Our state’s proud agricultural history makes it clear that North Carolinians care about supporting local farmers, large and small,” said Rochelle Sparko, Policy Director of the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association. “The Healthy Corner Store Initiative can help increase demand for local fruits and vegetables by creating additional markets for these goods. This initiative would help enhance the local distribution systems necessary for small farmers to thrive by connecting store owners and farmers and providing corner stores with the tools and knowledge necessary to sell fresh produce,” said Sparko.

For more information on the poll results, please visit: [www.ncallianceforhealth.org](http://www.ncallianceforhealth.org)

## **BACKGROUND:**

A Healthy Corner Store Initiative would assess communities for access to healthy foods, engage interested small retail store owners to offer healthier options, and provide participating retailers with marketing and technical assistance (signage, cooking demonstrations, etc.) to help them

promote the healthy foods they sell. The Initiative would work to connect these store owners with North Carolina farmers, benefiting local farmers by expanding their market opportunities. The Initiative would coordinate with SNAP and WIC to ensure underserved communities can maximize their utilization of these programs in the healthy corner store locations.

**About NC Alliance for Health:**

The North Carolina Alliance for Health is an independent, statewide coalition of public, private, professional and nonprofit organizations advocating for obesity and tobacco use prevention policies before North Carolina's legislative and executive branches. Alliance members and partners include the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association, the American Cancer Society, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Lung Association, NC Pediatric Society, Prevention Partners, NC Association of Local Health Directors, NC Public Health Association, March of Dimes, American Diabetes Association, Youth Empowered Solutions, NC Alliance of YMCA's, the Council of Churches and many others.

*The poll contains results of the statewide telephone survey measuring the opinions of North Carolina registered voters on access to healthy foods and possible solutions to food insecurity. The poll was funded by the American Heart Association. The survey was completed by Public Opinion Strategies on November 10-12, 2014, among 500 registered voters, including 150 cell phone respondents, and has a margin of error of +4.38%.*

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