

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While Sacramento is known as the Farm to Fork Capitol, access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables remains a challenge in many parts of the City and County. Key Informant Interviews were conducted from December 2018 through February 2019 in order to understand barriers to healthy retail access, identify opportunities for improving access to healthy retail within Sacramento County, and identify types of information and resources that would be most effective for decision-makers, implementers, and advocates to advance Safe Routes to Healthy Retail.

Stakeholders included local agencies, program implementers, age and ability oriented organizations, and business districts. The list of stakeholders interviewed is below:

- AARP
- City of Sacramento Department of Youth, Parks, and Community Enrichment
- Public Health Institute
- Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services
- Sacramento Regional Transit
- Society for the Blind
- Stockton Boulevard Partnership

Results from the interviews are summarized into stakeholder profiles. Each profile includes a description of what the organization does and who they represent, current gaps and barriers, and priorities and opportunities to improve food access in the Sacramento region. Key takeaways from the interviews include:

CURRENT BARRIERS: Major barriers to accessing healthy foods include high food costs, lack of access to transportation options, and unsafe streets.

VULNERABLE ROAD USERS: Creating safer active transportation infrastructure for vulnerable road users such as youth, older adults, and people with mobility disabilities is a priority.

ACCESS TO TRANSIT: Walking and transit are the primary modes of transportation to healthy retail locations for people who do not have access to or cannot drive a personal vehicle. As such, connectivity between transit and healthy retail is a high priority.

COLLABORATION: Facilitating greater cross-sector collaboration between local agencies, program implementers, retailers and business owners, and other organizations is key for advancing safe access to healthy retail.

ADAPTIVE SPACE: Existing spaces provide an opportunity to be converted or adapted into healthy food sites. Developing new stores on infill properties, converting existing stores to provide healthy options, creating community gardens, and offering healthy foods through more temporary pop-up locations are strategies to create a greater number and wider distribution of healthy food sites in neighborhoods.

COMMUNITY FOOD ACCESS PROFILE

WALKSacramento conducted intercept surveys at two food distribution location centers in the North and South Sacramento priority census tracts as part of the Sacramento Food Bank and Family Service Produce for all events. The surveys were completely anonymous and optional and gathered high-level information about food access, specifically mobility, transportation patterns, and opportunities to improve access to healthy foods. Results summarize conversations with approximately 30 people.

Mobility and Access to Healthy Foods

Driving was identified as the primary method of transportation for individuals and families to access healthy food sites such as grocery stores, farmer’s markets, and distribution centers. However, nearly 25% of people indicated that an active mode of travel, such as transit or walking, was a primary mode. Individuals who walk or use transit indicated that their trips tend to be moderately easy and moderately difficult, compared to very easy for people who drive.

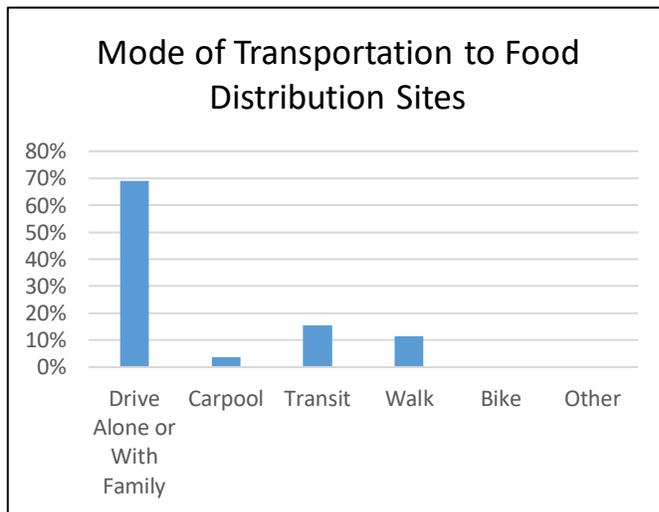


Table 1. Aggregated responses to question “How do you primarily get to places that have healthy food (grocery stores, farmer’s markets, etc.)”

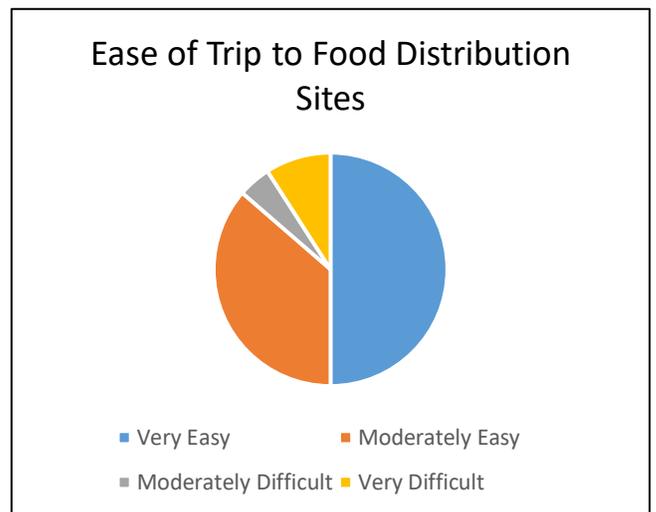
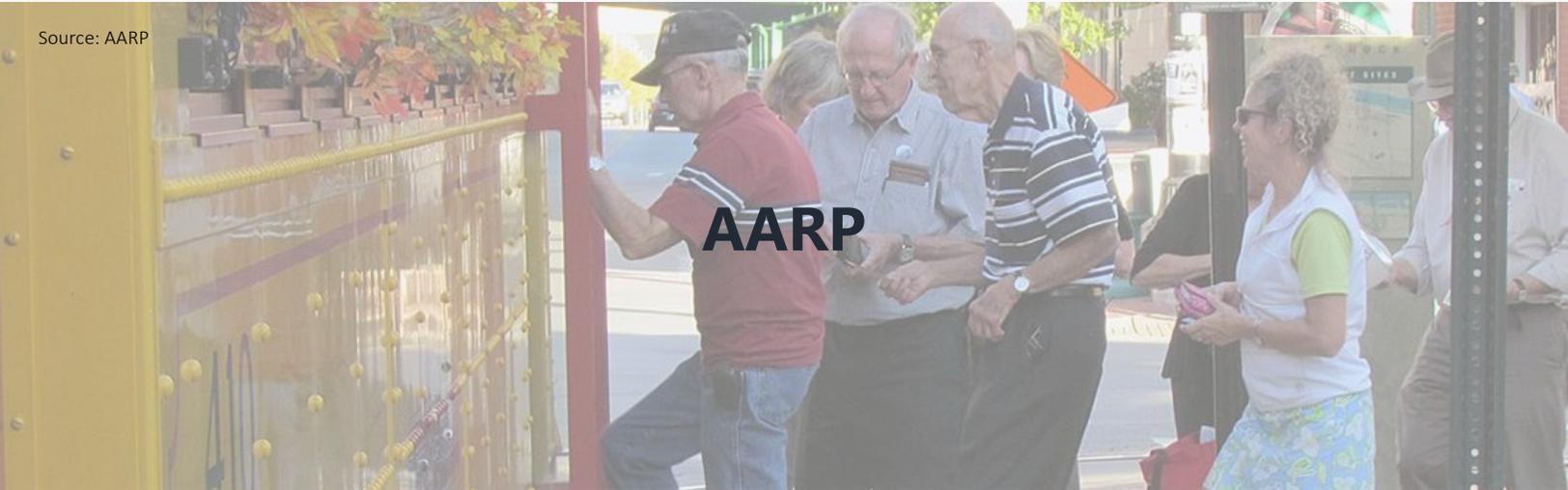


Table 2. Aggregated responses to question “How easy is your trip, taking into account time, comfort, and other factors?”

Community Priorities and Opportunities

Community members had an option to comment on what would make it easier or more convenient to access healthy foods. The key takeaways were cost, access and education. Many community members mentioned a strong desire to have affordable fruits and vegetables in addition to education for how to prepare healthier foods. The comments about access included convenience of location, walkability, access to transit, better information about transportation options (specifically for the ADA community), and more frequency and locations for food distribution events.



Who They Are

AARP is a national organization that advocates for independence and choice for individuals as they age, and as such mobility and the ability to “age in place” are key areas of focus. AARP applies an all-ages lens to various livability criteria including housing, transportation, and healthcare. AARP advocates for 10-minute walks to community destinations and has released resources that highlight how to create safer routes to healthy destinations for all ages, including a walk audit toolkit, community intercept surveys, and general access strategies. Through decades of all-ages advocacy and a strong network of older adults at the national, state, and regional scale, the Sacramento Chapter of AARP provides valuable insights for safe routes to healthy retail from an all-ages approach.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

While the 10-minute walk is becoming a widely accepted approach to healthy retail access, a 10-minute walk for an able-bodied person is not the same as a 10-minute walk for a child, an older adult, a parent with a stroller, or someone with a cane, walker, or mobility device. Young children and older adults have different walking speeds and stamina levels than able-bodied adults, which means that the walkshed for accessing healthy retail destinations is smaller for different age groups. Additionally, young children and older adults are more vulnerable to traffic injuries and should have routes with high visibility crossings, longer crossing times, and safer active transportation infrastructure. Convenience of public transportation is another concern, as older adults may not have access to a car or ability to drive.

Priorities and Opportunities

On a national level AARP advocates for comprehensive healthy retail access for people of all ages and abilities. The Sacramento Chapter can complement this work by adapting national policy to the specific needs of aging communities in the region and by working with local elected and community leaders to align community priorities with advocacy efforts. AARP expressed interest in learning more about how walk audits can be used as a community tool to activate neighborhood spaces and advocate for safe routes to important community destinations. Resources for funding to plan for and implement safe routes to healthy retail strategies, as well as resources for implementing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies along routes to healthy destinations are priorities for improving access by active transportation modes. Partnering with local transit agencies provides an opportunity for improving access to healthy retail for older adults as well.



CITY OF SACRAMENTO DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH, PARKS AND COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT

Who They Are

The City of Sacramento Department of Youth, Parks and Community Enrichment, formally the Department of Parks and Recreation, has jurisdiction over the majority of parks within the North and South Sacramento priority census tracts. The department manages over 200 parks throughout the City including neighborhood, community and regional parks. While the primary focus of the department is park management and community programs, the department has also been involved in healthy food access through creation of community gardens on park property. The department helped formalize urban gardening on Niño's Parkway, which was already informally being used as a community garden and has become a successful model.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

A lack of community engagement creates a gap in the provision of services to the community. By not knowing what the community really wants, the department cannot provide culturally relevant parks and programming. The department highlights the lack of access to ideas in the community, wishing to hear a more unified neighborhood voice relating to parks in their community. This can be manifested in under-utilized community gardens or a missed opportunity to improve food access. There is a significant cost barrier to community gardens, as formalizing the community garden on Niño's Parkway was a costly project.

Priorities and Opportunities

The department is uniquely poised to enact policy change with a General Plan update currently underway. The department is researching opportunities to develop more community gardens on park property as a way to improve food access and further activate existing parks. Currently, Councilmember Guerra's office has received a grant to create a community garden in Magoichi Oki Park, which indicates a desire and opportunity for parks to provide healthy foods. The department will benefit from a community engagement toolkit on how to work with community members to create culturally relevant parks and gardens in their communities.



PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE

Who They Are

Public Health Institute (PHI) works to improve wellness by discovering new research, strengthening key partnerships and programs, and advancing health policies in 26 countries around the world. PHI's primary focus on building health equity through policy and community change includes focus areas such as alcohol, tobacco, drugs and mental health, chronic disease prevention, environmental health, women, youth and children, and healthy communities. PHI's Center for Wellness and Nutrition is a national leader in developing campaigns, programs, and local, state, and national partnerships to reduce obesity and promote equity in vulnerable communities. Locally, PHI oversees Sacramento County's SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education) Retail Engagement and Partnerships Grant.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

Locally and nationally, the conversation around access to healthy retail is truly a proximity view, not a built environment view. When looking at proximity, none of the priority census tracts rank high on the limited healthy food access scales. However, these communities still struggle to access healthy retail due to built environment barriers. Grocery stores are often located in auto-oriented environments in more suburban areas due to the low cost of development and demand for vehicles to carry large loads of groceries. Residents in the priority census tracts face barriers to accessing these grocery stores due to distance, insufficient public transportation, inconsistent sidewalk infrastructure, and lack of vehicle ownership. Additionally, corner stores located within neighborhoods that are ideal for healthy retail conversions face high investment costs for the installation of refrigeration equipment for healthier foods.

Priorities and Opportunities

PHI's Center for Wellness and Nutrition has a rich library of healthy retail materials including promotional strategies and in-store marketing materials to increase the purchase of healthy foods, program ideas to connect healthy retail with local communities, and can help improve the availability, quality, and affordability of health foods in stores. PHI expressed interest in identifying programs such as healthy food wayfinding and healthy retail walk audits to increase awareness of access to healthy foods in neighborhood markets as well as better understand built environment barriers to accessing healthy foods in communities.



SACRAMENTO FOOD BANK AND FAMILY SERVICES

Who They Are

Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services (SFBFS) is a nonprofit organization that provides food bank services and family services to individuals and families in need. In particular, SFBFS' food access program helps distribute fresh fruits, vegetables, and other food items to families throughout Sacramento County, including neighborhoods in the North Sacramento and South Sacramento priority census tracts. The goal of the program is to improve access to low or no cost healthy food options in communities with food deserts or cost barriers to purchasing healthy foods. As a key service provider operating in the North and South Sacramento priority census tracts, SFBFS understands the barriers and opportunities for improving healthy food access for their clients.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

Food costs, access to transportation, and unsafe streets are some of the key barriers that impact residents. Many clients of SFBFS' food access programs are disabled, unable to drive, or do not have access to a car and therefore rely on carpooling, transit, or walking in order to access food distribution sites. While the food access program is designed only to support nutritional needs rather than be the sole source of healthy food for families, many residents rely on food distribution centers in this way due to limited daily access to healthy food stores and low-cost healthy foods. Several programs have been successful at addressing cost barriers, such as CalFresh which assists with food costs and Market Match which provides matching funds to customers who use federal nutrition benefits at farmer's markets. However, another challenge is that many people are unaware of these existing resources or underutilize cost reduction services.

Priorities for Improving Access

Improving transportation options, particularly for people with disabilities, is a priority for healthy food access. Siting healthy food stores within walking distance of communities that currently lack healthy options can help address transportation barriers as well. Many local organizations already provide assistance to retailers for healthy food conversions, providing an opportunity to expand these programs. Policies that attract healthy food stores in food desert communities is another opportunity to improve access.

Expanding targeted marketing and promotion of existing services can help reduce cost barriers for families that are unaware of cost reduction programs. Additionally, coordinating efforts among the numerous food distribution centers throughout the county can help improve efficiency, promotion, and delivery of services to ensure that healthy foods can be accessible at different days and times of the week as needed. SFBFS is currently working to coordinate with local food distribution centers to share resources and streamline efforts.



SACRAMENTO REGIONAL TRANSIT

Who They Are

Sacramento Regional Transit (SacRT) is a transit provider of bus and light rail service throughout Sacramento County. SacRT provides access to services and destinations along major commercial corridors and is an important mode of transportation for people accessing healthy foods within the North and South Sacramento priority census tracts.

SacRT is currently in the process of a route optimization study that is focusing on improving service along commercial corridors. The goal of the study is to increase transit reliability and consistency, making transit more convenient for both commuters and non-commute users. Improving transit service for non-commute trips, such as errands and leisure, can make it easier for people to access healthy retail destinations using an active travel mode.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

Current barriers for using transit as a transportation mode to healthy retail destinations include unsafe walking and biking infrastructure around transit stops and poor user-friendliness. Transit routes are often located along high volume corridors, which are not safe environments for riders traveling to or from transit stops using active modes. Lack of clear schedule information, understanding of how to use the transit system, and knowledge of destinations located near transit stops can discourage transit use, particularly for the first-time or infrequent user.

Priorities and Opportunities for Improving Access

Collaboration between transit agencies and local governments provides an opportunity for developing stronger grant applications, coordinating planning efforts, and implementing infrastructure improvements that increase first mile and last mile connections between transit and daily destinations. Because SacRT does not have jurisdiction over roads and infrastructure on routes to transit stops, partnerships with the City of Sacramento and County of Sacramento are critical for achieving multimodal accessibility. Proactive policies that address system wide design changes, particularly around first mile and last mile connections to transit, is a major priority to ensure that access to and from transit stops is safe for transit users.



Who They Are

Society for the Blind is a nonprofit that provides resources and programs for low vision and blind people, with a mission to empower individuals to live independently and have choice in their lifestyle. Low vision and blind people rely heavily on walking, transit, paratransit, and mobility services such as Uber and Lyft for transportation, providing unique insights on ways to improve multimodal accessibility to healthy retail destinations for people of all abilities.

In addition to providing resources and services, Society for the Blind advocates for disability rights and works with local agencies and officials to implement programs that benefit low vision and blind people. In the past they have collaborated with the Capitol Area Development Authority (CADA) on braille signage compliance in downtown Sacramento and currently work with local officials to address accessibility gaps and barriers.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

Quality of transportation infrastructure, wayfinding signage, and accessible route information and entrances are current barriers to accessing healthy destinations. Because low vision and blind people rely on alternative forms of transportation such as walking and public transit, smooth and unobstructed sidewalks and high quality public transit are critical for safe and convenient access. Accessible, safe, and easily identifiable entrances and boundaries to healthy retail sites are another priority to reduce barriers to accessing healthy foods. At farmers markets for example, a lack of clearly defined tactile or physical boundaries creates unsafe conditions by creating confusion about space designated for the market compared to space designated for the street.

Priorities and Opportunities

Clear and unobstructed sidewalks, access to public transit, and auditory and tactile wayfinding are the main priorities that Society for the Blind have identified for accessing healthy destinations. For healthy retail in particular, access to public transit should be the number one priority. Proximity to public transit and building orientation facing streets and sidewalks should be considered when siting and developing new healthy retail stores. Continuing to work with local agencies such as CADA around updating signage for Braille compliance is another opportunity to improve access through wayfinding. Society for the Blind's expertise and current work should serve as a resource for creating safe and accessible routes for low vision and blind individuals.

STOCKTON BOULEVARD PARTNERSHIP



Who They Are

The Stockton Boulevard Partnership (SBP) is a property and business improvement district along Stockton Boulevard, a major commercial corridor in the City of Sacramento. SBP focuses on safety and security, maintenance, economic development, and advocacy. Many of the businesses along Stockton Boulevard include small businesses, ethnic food stores, and fast food establishments.

Several SNAP retailers and grocery stores are currently located along Stockton Boulevard, which makes it a destination for residents accessing healthy foods. However, Stockton Boulevard is also a high speed and high volume arterial street that is unsafe for people walking and biking. SBP is involved in several initiatives with local agency partners that aim to improve multi-modal transportation access along Stockton Boulevard, including a Complete Street and Vision Zero safety study with the City of Sacramento and a high capacity corridor pilot project with Sacramento Regional Transit.

Current Gaps and Barriers to Access

Unsafe walking and biking conditions along with limited healthy food options are the major barriers to healthy retail access on Stockton Boulevard. Stockton Boulevard is characterized by high vehicle speeds between 50-60 miles per hour, high traffic volumes, far crossing distances, long block lengths, and multiple driveways that make walking and biking unsafe and uncomfortable. Beyond physical access to retail stores, Stockton Boulevard also does not have many healthy retail options available.

Priorities and Opportunities for Improving Access

Currently, SBP is collaborating with local agency partners to address infrastructure needs and improve safety along Stockton Boulevard. Identifying funding sources for implementation of infrastructure improvements is the next step to support these planning efforts.

Another opportunity for improving access to healthy foods along Stockton Boulevard is to develop more healthy food locations on infill properties along the corridor. Housing is currently a greater priority for SBP than healthy retail, however community members have expressed a desire for more accessible and affordable healthy food options. Healthy retail conversions may be one opportunity to create more options for community members by working with existing businesses rather than relying on new development. Community outreach best practices was identified by property and business owners as a valuable resource that would help them better understand community priorities and needs.