

Communities Putting Prevention to Work: The Healthy Corner Store Initiative

[Announcer] *This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Melissa Wilson] The prevalence of obesity in the rural United States is often higher than in urban or suburban areas. Part of this obesity epidemic could be due to residents doing their grocery shopping in food marts and convenience stores. Dr. Stephanie Jilcott Pitts and her team wanted to see if there were healthy foods available in these corner stores.

I'm Melissa Wilson for CDC's journal, *Preventing Chronic Disease*. Dr. Pitts is joining me by phone today to discuss her study and the Healthy Corner Store initiative. Dr. Pitts is associate professor in the Department of Public Health at East Carolina University, and her two-part study was featured in the July 18, 2013 issue of *Preventing Chronic Disease*. Thank you for joining us today, Dr. Pitts.

[Dr. Pitts] Well, thanks for the opportunity to talk about our study, Melissa.

[Melissa Wilson] Dr. Pitts, what were the main goals of this project?

[Dr. Pitts] Well, the CDC funded a project called CPPW, or the Communities Putting Prevention to Work project, and our main goals were to provide the CPPW team with a lay of the land, so to speak, in terms of the food sources that were available in Pitt County, and Pitt County's in Eastern North Carolina. We had a focus on small corner stores that were in rural areas of Pitt County, and we also wanted to learn about the pros and cons of a healthy corner store initiative, both from the corner store owner and from the customer's perspectives. And ultimately, we wanted to give the CPPW team a list of corner stores that they could consider approaching as they began the Healthy Corner Store initiative.

[Melissa Wilson] Did you face any obstacles during the assessment, or interview, process?

[Dr. Pitts] Definitely. Two team members were conducting assessments in some corner stores and in a few instances, there were examples of criminal activity in or around the stores and I think that the two team members were kind of concerned about that. I was pretty concerned about it, and so we tried to take some safety precautions. Other obstacles included trying to figure out which assessment tools to use in the stores; trying to get the store owners to allow us to actually conduct assessments, which typically wasn't really a problem, but sometimes was; and then finding enough customers who were willing to take five or ten minutes out of their day to be surveyed, 'cause we were at these corner stores where people expect to kind of pop in and pop out.

[Melissa Wilson] How can projects like this help improve the health of our nation's urban population?

[Dr. Pitts] Well, the basic process that we used to look at the food environment in Pitt County in rural Eastern North Carolina has been used in urban places like Philadelphia or New York or

Baltimore, even New Orleans, and so, the process is just assessing what's available in the stores, talking to the owners and the customers about what would be best to include in a healthy corner store initiative, and from what I gather from those prior studies in the larger cities, the corner stores are a really important source of food for kids that are going to and from school in urban areas and for lower income residents who don't have easy access to large supermarkets. So barriers between rural and urban residents are similar when they're facing trying to get healthy food, and so solutions like stocking and promoting healthier food in the corner stores can be similar.

[Melissa Wilson] What does this mean for future public health research and programs?

[Dr. Pitts] Well the work we did in assessing the food environment in Pitt County helped the CPPW team be able to go into four pilot corner stores and help the owners improve the food environment in those stores so that healthy foods were more available to customers. So we hope that our project can really be a model for others who are doing similar work in rural areas of the United States.

[Melissa Wilson] Thank you for joining us today, Dr. Pitts. You can read her articles online at www.cdc.gov/pcd.

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