Background

Arizona grapples with persistent obesity rates, and federally-funded programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education (SNAP-Ed) seek to support healthier food purchases in small stores to encourage healthy eating behaviors.

Objective

To develop a feasible in-store healthy retail assessment tool for Arizona SNAP-Ed, and to use it to measure the baseline availability, appeal, and promotion of healthier foods in small stores.

Study Design, Setting and Participants

Baseline supports for healthier food purchases were measured at 17 small (e.g. convenience, corner) food stores in 5 counties by SNAP-Ed local implementing agency staff using the Stocking Opportunities in the Retail Environment (STORE) tool, a brief in-store assessment adapted from New York City’s research-tested Shop Healthy initiative.

Outcome Measures and Analysis

The STORE tool measured the baseline availability, appeal, and promotion of produce and healthier options in four food categories: 1) canned goods, 2) grains and beans, 3) snacks, and 4) beverages and frozen foods. Data analysis included basic statistics to translate raw results into comparable scores in each STORE category as a percentage of the maximum achievable score.

Results

Average scores were low (33% as a percent of the maximum achievable score) across all four categories, suggesting that these retailers were well-positioned to enhance their healthy retail supports through partnership with SNAP-Ed. Scores for fresh produce (31%) and beverages/frozen (40%) were higher relative to other categories, while canned goods (10%) scored lowest.

Conclusions and Implications

The results will direct priority areas for healthy retail interventions individualized to each store. The assessment will also be used as a follow up evaluation after in-store healthy retail interventions have been implemented, to measure changes in purchase supports over time. Therefore, the STORE tool
provides a feasible evaluation mechanism to assess the baseline and follow-up availability, appeal, and promotion characteristics of small stores targeted for healthy retail intervention.