

Food Desert to Food Oasis Symposium

CHC, PolicyLink and Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) sponsored *Food Desert to Food Oasis* at the Center for Healthy Communities in Los Angeles on April 8-9. The Symposium brought together more than 150 concerned citizens and representatives from community-based organizations, local government agencies, and independent grocers to discuss what can be done to stimulate grocery store and business development in South LA.

The two-day event featured guest speakers from across the country to present their success stories and lessons learned in changing the food resource environment in urban areas. Sessions were designed to stimulate public and private reinvestment by providing policymakers with strategies to attract developers of retail grocery stores into low-income, urban neighborhoods; reframing the economic profile of South Los Angeles for retailers; and equipping local communities with the knowledge and tools to be active players in retail development.

Participants examined two potential sites for retail development in South Los Angeles. Representatives from the City of Los Angeles Planning Department, Community Redevelopment Agency along with the California Grocers Association and Ward Economic Development Corporation worked together to develop a blueprint for policymakers on what they can do to facilitate the establishment of new food retailers in South Los Angeles.

The data presented and stories shared of progress made in communities across the nation, demonstrate the feasibility of changing the landscape in South Los Angeles from a food desert to a food oasis. A follow-up to the Symposium will be held at Community Health Councils in mid-May. For more information, contact Heili Kim at Heili@chc-inc.org.

State Ballot Measures

California will be holding a special election on May 19th around seven ballot measures mostly addressing the state's \$42 billion budget deficit. Six of the seven ballot

measures were voted onto the ballot as part of a negotiation package in special legislative session on February 16th between the Governor and State Legislator. Propositions 1A through 1F were intended to address the state's estimated budget shortfall.

Health advocates are focusing on three ballot measures:

- Proposition 1A, which combines a 4-year tax hike of about \$16 billion along with placing a state spending cap
- Proposition 1D, which will ask voters to redirect Proposition 10 (1998) First 5 dollars to pay for other state health and human services programs currently funded by the state general fund
- Proposition 1E, which will authorize funds shift from Proposition 63 (2004) targeted for mental health programs to pay for the state's share of the "Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment Program" providing Medicaid services for low-income person under age 21.

The Governor and Legislators are seeking to have all ballot measure pass to help address and balance the state budget. CHC is preparing a brief Voter Ballot Guide for consumers. Anyone interested in receiving copies should contact Mark Paredes at mark@chc-inc.org. For more information, also visit State of California Voter Information Guide <http://www.voterguide.sos.ca.gov/> or League of Women's Voters at <http://ca.lwv.org/>

Achieving Equitable Health Environment

Strengthening Federal Clean Air Act

Health and environmental advocates from Baldwin Hills and Wilmington are joining with residents from 33 other states to request their US representatives strengthen national standards around oil drilling and production sites. Advocates are particularly concerned that the federal government does not recognize hydrogen sulfide as a hazardous pollutant. Although linked to headaches, nausea, and memory-loss with low exposures and death at high exposures, hydrogen sulfide was removed from the Federal Clean Air Act and is not under the same regulations as other toxic chemicals found at oil production sites.

Maintaining California Environmental Quality Act

In addition to strengthening federal standards, health advocates want to see existing local standards upheld. The Air Quality Management District, the main air quality regulatory agency of California, has proposed SB 696, which would provide exemptions from the California Environmental Quality Act by lowering the amount of environmental review required for high-polluting, for-profit industries.

If passed, SB 696 would reverse a Superior Court decision by allowing a power plant to move into a densely-populated East LA community. It would have disproportionate impacts on the already vulnerable populations of California and be a step backwards for green technology and renewable energy. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors passed a motion opposing SB 696 on April 7th.

A recent national study by the United Church of Christ found polluting industries are routinely located closer to racial and ethnic minority neighborhoods and that these communities are not equally protected by environmental laws. The 2007 report ranked Greater Los Angeles first among major urban areas with the most people living near hazardous waste facilities. The report found that the placement of these hazardous sites is the intentional result of local, state and federal land-use policies.

Mid-Year Status Reporting Temporarily Suspended

Senate Bill X 3 24 (Alquist) temporarily reinstates 12-month continuous Medi-Cal eligibility for children, allowing California to qualify for approximately \$10 billion in federal stimulus funds via a temporary increase in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP). The bill reinstates continuous eligibility for children while increased federal funding is available.

Under the bill, Mid-Year Status Reporting (MSR) restrictions will resume in January 2011. The bill extends the MSR policy an additional half year beyond its original date until July 2012. SB X 3 24 calls for the Department of Health Care Services to redetermine continuous eligibility of any child whose eligibility period was determined and redetermined during the first 3 months of 2009.

While supportive of the state's efforts to ensure that CA qualifies for the increased FMAP dollars through the Economic Recovery Package, advocates are concerned that the MSRs are only temporarily suspended until January 2011. Under the recently-passed Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA), federal performance bonus funds are available to states that enroll eligible Medicaid children above a target number. California will likely not qualify for performance bonus funding in the recently passed CHIPRA legislation if the restrictive MSR policy resuming in January 2011 is kept in place. As a result, California will be out of the running for a portion of the \$4.4 billion estimated federal performance bonus funds. CHC and its coalitions will continue to urge the Governor and legislature to repeal the MSR permanently.

LA County Releases 2008-09 Budget

County officials released a proposed 2009-10 budget that called for \$415 million in reduced spending and the elimination of 1,600 county positions. The proposed \$22.8 billion dollar budget is heavily affected by the current economic fiscal situation, with revenues decreasing due to a drop in home prices concurrent with an increase in unemployment and demand for county public services. All departments were asked to budget a 5% cut in funding requests except for the Department of Health Services (DHS). Nonetheless, DHS plans to eliminate 165 positions and is estimated to face a \$257 million deficit that could worsen depending on state and federal shortfalls. The county budget is expected to change should Governor Schwarzenegger's May revisions include more cuts to healthcare services.

Public hearings on the proposed budget are expected to begin May 13, with adoption expected on June 22. For more information, visit the LA County CEO website at <http://ceo.lacounty.gov/>.

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