

Press Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JANUARY 25, 2012

CONTACT: Janice Taylor / Communications Director
323.295.9372 • janice@chc-inc.org

Freedom to Choose: What's on the Menu?

Fast Food Restaurant Report: Promoting Healthy Dining in South Los Angeles

Los Angeles, CA — The fact that South Los Angeles is saturated with fast food restaurants typically serving foods high in fat, sodium or sugar with few essential nutrients is not news nor are the higher rates of CVD, obesity, and diabetes. But the explanations and solutions for the proliferation of fast food restaurants and these diet-related epidemics have been less than satisfactory. *Fast Food Restaurant Report: Promoting Healthy Dining in South Los Angeles*, released today by Community Health Councils (CHC) and available at www.chc-inc.org/policy-briefs, presents a growing body of evidence on the correlation between the proximity and density of fast food restaurants and greater fast food consumption and argues for regulating density as part of a strategy to combat the obesity crisis in South LA. The report recommends policy and systems changes the City of Los Angeles and Los Angeles County, inc. can adopt to limit the density of fast food restaurants in South Los Angeles, while encouraging the development of new healthy restaurants of all types.

“A rich and diverse food resource environment gives residents a greater opportunity to make choices that support healthy living,” says Lark Galloway-Gilliam, executive director of Community Health Councils. “An environment where nutritional resources are limited to fast food restaurants, convenience stores, and corner grocery stores makes it difficult for people to eat a healthy diet. A walk down South Figueroa Street exemplifies the over-concentration of fast food restaurants common in South LA: Between 27th and 31st streets, 16 fast food restaurants line both sides of the street.”

The South LA food environment is of particular concern because of the high rates of obesity and chronic disease in the community. South LA has the highest rates of adult (35%) and childhood obesity (29%) in the County. In comparison, the rates are 10% and 17% respectively in West LA. With about half of healthcare costs for obesity footed by taxpayers through Medicare and Medicaid, this is a matter of public as well as personal concern.

Public health and planning professionals including the Institute of Medicine, CDC, and Center for Law & Public Health suggest one way to lessen the influence of fast food restaurants on people's diets and increase access to healthy foods is through zoning. Los Angeles has a long history of employing land-use regulations to achieve public health goals and communities across the country have enacted regulations on

—more—

fast food restaurants in several different ways. The regulations include bans on fast food restaurants or drive-through service, bans on formula restaurants, limits on the total number or the density of fast food restaurants, and regulations based on healthy menu criteria. The *Fast Food Restaurant Report* considers and builds upon these options for strengthening South LA's fast food restaurant development policy as follows:

1. Extending the criteria to obtain a construction permit to all fast food restaurants in South LA, not just stand-alone establishments
2. Adding an additional criteria requiring new fast food restaurants in South LA to locate at least a half mile away from schools, parks, playgrounds, child care centers, recreation facilities, and other children-oriented facilities
3. Adding a criteria requiring new fast food restaurants in South LA to locate at least 750 feet from bus, rail and other transit stops
4. Defining a healthy restaurant based on the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*
5. Providing an exemption from distance requirements for fast food restaurants meeting the healthy restaurant definition
6. Strengthening the City's Grocery Store and Sit-Down Restaurant Incentive Program and extending incentives to healthy fast food restaurants
7. Monitoring healthy restaurants that receive zoning and/or financial incentives for continued compliance with the healthy restaurant criteria and establishing penalties for non-compliance.

“Many factors contribute to the increase in obesity and diet-related chronic disease — including poverty, lack of opportunities for physical activity, inadequate healthcare, lack of nutrition education, and limited health literacy,” says Gwendolyn Flynn, policy director at Community Health Councils. “No single step will solve these complex and multi-faceted epidemics. However, doing nothing or refusing to acknowledge the consequences of an overconcentration of unhealthy fast food restaurants will magnify their role in encouraging obesity and disease. We must work to create a food environment in South LA where healthy foods are accessible and messages that support health are common.”

This brief is the second in a series of reports on transforming South LA's food desert. *Food Desert to Food Oasis* focused on the development of new full-service grocery stores in underserved neighborhoods, documenting the food resource environment in South LA and the area's market potential and providing recommendations to attract healthy food retail to South LA. This latest report demonstrates that even under a tight budget and difficult economic times, many changes are viable for the City and County of Los Angeles and will provide a return on investment in the long term by improving the health of the community.

Read the full report at www.chc-inc.org/policy-briefs .

Community Health Councils is a non-profit, community-based health promotion, advocacy and policy organization. Established in 1992, CHC's mission is to improve health and increase access to quality healthcare for uninsured, under-resourced, and underserved populations.