



# CX<sup>3</sup>

## A Health Snapshot of Our Communities

*Eat better and get more exercise.* That's what public health officials have said for years and yet, even in the face of heightened media and public awareness, California residents are growing increasingly overweight or obese. Where's the disconnect?

The Yolo County Health Department, working with the statewide Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity (CX<sup>3</sup>) program took a ground-level look at low-income neighborhoods in Yolo County to understand the dynamics, shaping health behaviors. The findings are both revealing and instructional and could guide Yolo County in making community-wide changes to significantly improve the health of Yolo County.

**Challenged Communities**

There is growing evidence that what people eat and the likelihood of being overweight is influenced by the environment where they live. More than half of all Yolo County adults are overweight or obese. As we struggle to reverse the alarming trends, access to healthy foods and physical activity is more important than ever.

A recent statewide study showed that there are four times as many "unhealthy" food outlets (fast food restaurants and convenience stores) as "healthy" food outlets (supermarkets, produce vendors and farmers' markets) in California. Convenience stores, small corner markets and gas stations are often the only food retailers available in low-income neighborhoods. Neighborhoods without access to healthy food from supermarkets or larger grocery stores are being coined "food deserts." Residents who can't drive are left to either take a bus or taxi to the nearest large grocery store, both time-consuming and costly.

Consider these health facts:

- In low-income neighborhoods, each additional supermarket has been found to increase residents' likelihood of meeting nutritional guidelines by one-third.
- Residents in communities with a more "nutritious" food environment (where fast food and corner stores are more convenient and prevalent than large grocery stores) have more health problems and higher mortality than residents of areas with a higher proportion of large grocery stores, when other factors are held constant.
- The presence of a supermarket in a neighborhood is linked to higher fruit and vegetable consumption and lower rates of overweight and obesity.
- Children and adults who report eating higher intakes of fruit on a daily basis have a lower body mass index (BMI) than those with lower intakes.
- Research suggests that about one-fifth of cancer deaths were related to nutrition, physical inactivity, obesity or overweight and could have been prevented.

**Obesity Costs**

Overweight and obesity are serious health issues associated with increased risk of morbidity and mortality from chronic diseases. These health issues are most pronounced among low-income communities. In addition to the negative consequences these health problems have for individuals, it also takes a toll on the economy through increases in health care costs, workers compensation and costs associated with loss of productivity.





