



Community Health Briefs

Twin Cities Mobile Market — UCare

Innovation Strategy

The Twin Cities, Minnesota, metro area has been named the fifth-largest urban food desert in the U.S. Residing in an a geographic area where affordable and nutritious food is hard to obtain directly correlates with increased rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, other diet-related disease and earlier death – especially for the elderly, people with disabilities, immigrants, refugees and low-income residents who do not own a vehicle. These areas are often filled with fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer junk food, not basic foods needed for a healthy diet.

UCare partnered with the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation to launch the Twin Cities Mobile Market initiative. This “grocery store on wheels” sells healthy foods at below-market prices in low-income neighborhoods considered food deserts. More than 275,000 low-income residents of Minneapolis and St. Paul neighborhoods who do not have access to grocery stores that sell fresh, healthy foods, can now benefit from this mobile market.

The Twin Cities Mobile Market’s goals are to improve the health of people living in these communities by providing consistent access to affordable fresh produce and whole foods, as well as education and resources that empower residents to prepare healthy meals.

Root Determinants of Health Addressed in This Initiative

- Exercise
- Diet
- Health Literacy
- Healthy Thinking
- Education

Program Description

The Twin Cities Mobile Market launched in December 2014 and currently serves 18 St. Paul-area locations each week. The Mobile Market is a converted Metro Transit bus that breaks with traditional food distribution systems and goes directly into low-income neighborhoods to sell wholesome and healthy foods.

The Twin Cities Mobile Market fills a gap between food shelves and full-service supermarkets by providing a wide selection of healthy foods at below-market prices.



Anyone can shop on the market bus. No forms or registration are required. Credit cards, debit cards, cash and payment via the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Electronic Benefit Transfer system are accepted.

The Twin Cities Mobile Market maintains a regular schedule so families can rely on the market for their weekly food shopping. The market is stocked with foods to accommodate a variety of cultural diets. Partnerships have been formed with area vendors to provide customers with nutrition education, cooking demonstrations and recipes featuring the items in stock.

A second bus was recently purchased to expand the program's reach to North Minneapolis and Cedar Riverside neighborhoods.

Results

Since the launch of the Mobile Market, more than 2,251 customers have made more than 13,465 purchases aboard the bus. Produce accounts for more than half of the total sales, indicating the Mobile Market is meeting a significant need for access to affordable fruits and vegetables. A survey of customers found that nearly 70 percent reported an increased intake of fruits and vegetables, indicating that Mobile Market shoppers have increased their consumption of fresh produce.

"Nina" is a regular Mobile Market customer who lives in a public housing high rise. Nina had been solely consuming food from the vending machine before the Mobile Market began visiting her building. She began buying her groceries in the winter of 2015-2016 from the Mobile Market and has lost 73 pounds – and significantly improved her health.



Many served are grateful they no longer need to stand out in cold Minnesota winters waiting to take a one-hour bus ride to a grocery store only to be limited to what they can manage to carry home on the bus. "Mark," a customer who lives in Section 8 housing, said he used take a city bus to the closest supermarket and fill two duffel bags with his grocery purchases for the ride home. Unfortunately, one of Mark's bags and its contents was stolen. Now, Mark says he's so thankful to have the Twin Cities Mobile Market right outside his door every single week. Another customer said the Twin Cities Mobile Market has enabled him to buy watermelons for the first time in almost five years because he doesn't have to carry them home on the bus.

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