Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
PolicyLab

Pass the Love: A Systematic Evaluation to Advance the U.S. Food Landscape towards Health Equity

Statement of Problem

Fewer than 20% of American children and adults eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables daily, despite the importance of these foods for promoting health and preventing chronic disease. Further, low-income, racial/ethnic minority populations in the U.S. experience a lower diet quality compared to their high-income, White counterparts. This disparity is due, in part, to widening income inequality that disproportionately affects families of color, as well as an abundance of inexpensive, processed and shelf-stable foods—and has only been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

All families should have the resources they need to pass along healthy cooking and eating traditions, but if families can't afford or make use of available fresh produce and whole ingredients, they will not reap the benefits of improved health.

Efforts to improve the diets of low-income families need to address their context and be accessible within their daily lives. Partnership for a Healthier America's Pass the Love with Waffles + Mochi, a month-long fresh food meal kit program intended to distribute 1 million meals across the U.S., is one such program that has the potential to remove many of the planning and shopping barriers to healthy home cooking and eating.

Description

Together with Partnership for a Healthier America, we will evaluate the impact of Pass the Love with Waffles + Mochi on participating families in geographically diverse U.S. cities. Our team will identify and explore the social, economic, and cultural factors that enable and constrain people to eat healthfully and adopt new eating habits after participating in Pass the Love.

In the first phase of this work, we guided the development of assessment criteria based on our team's previous experience assessing food planning, procurement and preparation habits among low-income families.

Prior to the rollout of Pass the Love, we will invite families to complete surveys that explore their food-related attitudes and habits. Six to eight weeks after participants finish the month-long program, we will survey families to explore whether their attitudes and behaviors have changed. We will also conduct in-depth interviews to identify the range of personal, cultural, and value-based experiences participants have with Pass the Love, and how this influences their attitudes towards shopping, cooking and eating.

Next Steps

Efforts to improve population health and diet must account for how people experience food amid a complex socioeconomic and cultural landscape. Only recently has research begun to focus on how lived

experience—the complex combination of personal qualities, social forces and structural inequalities—shapes how and what people eat. It is our hope that the findings from this study will inform a transformation of the food landscape to support healthier habits among high-risk families, ultimately supporting health equity.

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