Perspectives From Urban WIC-Eligible Caregivers to Improve Produce Access

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The Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) provides fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables (FV) to eligible participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). However, redemption of FMNP benefits remains low. This qualitative study explores facilitators and barriers to produce access and FMNP redemption for caregivers of WIC-eligible children in Philadelphia during the COVID-19 pandemic. We conducted semistructured phone interviews with caregivers between August and December 2020 to understand experiences with produce access and programming preferences to increase benefit redemption and produce consumption. We used content analysis with constant comparison with code interviews inductively and identified emerging themes through an iterative process. Participants (n = 30) wanted their children to eat more produce but described barriers to produce access, including limited availability, higher cost, and limited time. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and WIC benefits improved the ability to purchase produce, but difficulties with electronic benefit transfer and pandemic-related office closures limited use of WIC benefits. Similarly, lack of convenient market locations and hours prohibited use of FMNP benefits. Caregivers described that an ideal food program would be delivery based, low cost, offer a variety of FV, and provide recipes and educational activities. WIC-eligible caregivers want their children to eat more produce; however, they face multiple barriers in redeeming their benefits to access fresh produce. Delivery-based, low-cost produce programs may lead to increased produce access as well as benefit use. Future study is needed on feasibility and acceptability of produce delivery options among WIC-eligible families.

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