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## Healthy checkout policy frequently asked questions

### WHAT IS HEALTHY CHECKOUT?

Healthy checkout refers to efforts to improve the nutrition in the food and beverage products sold in areas where shoppers stand in line to purchase their groceries. All customers must pass through and spend time in the checkout area, making it a prime location for marketing. Healthy checkout is a strategy that changes the foods and beverages offered in the checkout aisle to make it easier for customers and their children to avoid both marketing and impulse purchases of sugary drinks and snacks high in sugar and salt.

### WHY SHOULD WE REQUIRE STORES TO HAVE HEALTHY CHECKOUT AISLES?

Most people want to get in and out of the grocery store as quickly as possible. And sometimes when we're in a rush, convenience overrides our best judgement. Changing where different categories of food are located within supermarkets to make healthier choices easier for consumers can have a meaningful impact on public health.<sup>1-3</sup> In polling of American shoppers in 2021, 70% consider healthier checkout a benefit to their shopping experience.<sup>4</sup> More than three quarters of parents who shop with their kids would switch from their regular grocery store to a store that offered this type of checkout lane.<sup>4</sup>

### WHY PASS A POLICY INSTEAD OF RELYING ON VOLUNTARY CORPORATE POLICIES?

Successful policy passage ensures that every retailer makes healthy choices available at checkout. While pilots or voluntary corporate policies are meaningful, they do not lead to sustained change. Voluntary policies can lead to inequitable enforcement, as stores in more affluent communities within the same area may be more likely to comply with a voluntary policy. To ensure equitable compliance of all retailers within a specific geographic boundary, a policy change is needed.

## **WHY FOCUS ON SUPERMARKETS OR LARGE GROCERY STORES RATHER THAN SMALLER FORMAT STORES?**

Almost two-thirds of Americans' calories come from large grocery stores.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, supermarkets and superstores are key sources of groceries for SNAP participants, as more than three-quarters of SNAP benefits are redeemed at these stores.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, policies primarily focused on the largest food retailers where Americans do most of their grocery shopping have the greatest potential public health impact.

## **SHOULDN'T IT BE SHOPPERS' RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES?**

It's not that shoppers can't make healthy choices in a grocery store, it's that often we are being pushed towards unhealthy options. Placing products in high visibility locations, such as the checkout aisle, is a key marketing strategy. Big food and beverage manufacturers spend billions of dollars to place their products in the most prominent places in grocery stores, maximizing their own profitability and influencing our purchases.<sup>7</sup> When those highly marketed products are loaded with added sugars and sodium, it sabotages our efforts to eat healthier. It's time to ask that grocery stores promote food and drinks that support our health instead of undermining it.

## **DO HEALTHY CHECKOUT POLICIES TAKE AGENCY AWAY FROM CONSUMERS?**

No. Policies requiring grocery stores to promote healthier options don't take agency away from consumers – they return it to consumers. Consumers want healthy foods in their checkout aisles. Communities across the nation are advocating for healthy checkout policies. A 2021 poll of U.S. shoppers found that 73% think grocery stores should do more to make it easier for people to eat healthfully and 81% would prefer to shop at a grocery store that offered promotions and sales on healthier items rather than unhealthy items.<sup>4</sup>

## **WILL A HEALTHY CHECKOUT POLICY BE BAD FOR BUSINESS?**

This ordinance does not prohibit stores from selling any products—only what they can place in the checkout aisles. There are many healthier products from the same companies that can replace unhealthy products in the checkout aisle. For example: Coca Cola sells both Coke (a 20 fl oz bottle with 65 grams of added sugars)<sup>8</sup> and Minute Maid juice (a 6 fl oz box with no added sugar),<sup>9</sup> and Mars sells both Milky Way candy bars (a single 1.84 oz bar has 29 grams of added sugars)<sup>10</sup> and Kind bars (a standard size 40g dark chocolate nuts and sea salt bar has 4 grams of added sugars).<sup>11</sup>

## **ARE HEALTHY RETAIL POLICIES FEASIBLE?**

Yes. Major retailers and producers are already voluntarily complying with healthy retail measures across the country.<sup>12</sup> ALDI began introducing healthier checkout lanes in its stores in 2015.<sup>13</sup> In 2016, Raley's eliminated sugar-sweetened soda at the register and pledged to reduce candy at checkout aisles by 25%.<sup>14</sup> While the agreements that grocery chains sign with manufacturers are often multi-year contracts, policy change gives retailers leverage to renegotiate these contracts. Policies can also be written with a considerable runway (time between legislative passage and implementation) to give retailers time to renegotiate these contracts.

## **WHY DO HEALTHY CHECKOUT POLICIES REQUIRE 100% HEALTHY ITEMS IN CHECKOUT RATHER THAN 50% OR ANOTHER INCREMENTAL CHANGE?**

We know the current checkout environment features disproportionately unhealthy products – a recent evaluation of checkout areas across a variety of retailers (e.g., supermarkets, dollar stores, drug stores) found 70% of items at checkout are unhealthy.<sup>15</sup> We also know that healthy product placement in prominent areas of the store, like checkout, increases sales of those products.<sup>16,17</sup> However, because of the pervasiveness of unhealthy products throughout prominent places in the store, research has found that smaller changes in healthy product placement, such as a 10% increase in healthy product placement in high visibility areas such as check out aisles and aisle endcaps, do not meaningfully increase customer purchases of healthy food groups.<sup>18,19</sup> To make healthy choices available, accessible, and easy at checkout, the checkout aisle needs to undergo significant, not incremental change.

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