



FINI GROCERY STORE Rx PROGRAM

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAM
REACH, EFFECTIVENESS,
ADOPTION, IMPLEMENTATION,
& MAINTENANCE

PREPARED BY

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Executive summary

Background

Evidence suggests that moderate to high fruit and vegetable intake, when included within a balanced diet, can mitigate the risk of many chronic diseases and improve overall health. However, most Americans do not reach the recommended daily intake of fruits or vegetables. This is disproportionately the case for low-income individuals and other vulnerable populations. Through a Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive grant, the Washington State Department of Health has developed the *Grocery Store Rx* program as part of its strategy to incentivize fruit and vegetable purchases among Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants. Through the *Grocery Store Rx* program, participants receive prescription vouchers that can be redeemed for fruits and vegetables at partnering retail locations.

Project purpose and goals

We have partnered with Washington State Department of Health to provide a comprehensive assessment of the *Grocery Store Rx* program and its implementation in Washington State using the RE-AIM framework. This framework assesses program reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation, and maintenance of the program. A secondary goal is to conduct a comprehensive literature review on the impact of fruit and vegetable incentive programs on health outcomes and healthcare expenditures to inform program best practices.

Methods

The *Grocery Store Rx* program was evaluated by analyzing participant surveys, voucher distribution and redemption data, and conducting and analyzing interviews with key staff from 11 provider organizations and a stakeholder from the Washington State Department of Health. Participant surveys were analyzed using an open-coding method. Voucher distribution and redemption data were analyzed by quarter and site. Provider and stakeholder interviews were coded by theme.

Key results (see appendix for result figures)

- **Reach:** As of September 2018, an estimated that 3,600 individuals participated in the program statewide. Currently, 11 provider agencies participate in the program. Provider organizations were heterogeneous in methods of distributing vouchers, with many pairing voucher distributions with nutrition education or other programs. Provider interviews indicated a desire to reach as many people as possible, including expanding to include those who are low-income and food insecure but SNAP-ineligible.
- **Effectiveness:** To date, over \$382,000 worth of vouchers were distributed, of which 54% or nearly \$208,000 were redeemed. Most survey participants reported increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables, positive changes in eating behaviors, overall lifestyle changes, and positive health outcomes. Similarly, providers indicated that the program increased attendance at nutrition education and cooking classes.
- **Adoption:** The Department of Health indicated that the number of participating provider agencies has grown since the program began in July 2016 and increasing interest has been expressed by other agencies throughout the state to join the program.

- **Implementation:** Insights from participant surveys indicate about half of participants reported ease of use and a positive experience using the program. Some barriers faced by participants include transportation and/or proximity to Safeway (the sole participating grocery store chain) and difficulty redeeming vouchers. The most common challenges reported by providers were expanding the reach of the program, freeing up sufficient internal resources, and fulfilling voucher tracking and reporting needs.
- **Maintenance:** Most providers reported successful integration and buy-in from their organization for the program. Providers were interested in expanding to more program settings, populations, and grocery stores. To sustain the program, providers primarily cited the need for ongoing funding and improved tracking.

Discussion

This study suggests that the *Grocery Store Rx* program has a beneficial impact on healthy eating behavior, for both adults and children in families participating in the program. Additional funds would allow the Department of Health to extend participation to additional participants and providers. Provider feedback indicated that while the program made a positive impact on their participants, the implementation of the program, particularly tracking and reporting of the vouchers, was time-intensive. Despite these challenges, participants and providers hope to see the program continue.

Recommendations

- **Introduce electronic systems:** An electronic system for use would make vouchers available on Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) or other similar debit-style cards. Transitioning to an electronic voucher system has benefits for participants, partner organizations, and the Department of Health. While electronic merging would be costly and resource-intensive, it would provide the greatest long-term benefits.
- **Offer price-varied vouchers:** Offering vouchers of varying amounts (i.e. \$5, \$10, \$20 etc.) would improve patient shopping experience by decreasing the need for multiple transactions. Varied amounts would allow for more flexibility and improved redemption by those who are unable to eat/store large amounts of fresh produce.
- **Ease transportation barriers and increase grocery store chain participation:** Addressing these commonly reported barriers to voucher usage would increase redemption rates. Providing participants with information on reduced-fare transit options and partnering with a variety of grocery chains would improve participant access to stores.
- **Improve the redemption experience through cashier and manager training:** Introducing efficient training strategies in Safeway stores would improve the redemption experience. Standardized visual printouts with voucher information and guidelines for cashiers would be tools to provide immediate validation of vouchers.
- **Increased provider communication:** Introducing a Department of Health-monitored platform for provider-to-store communication would improve the redemption process.

Appendix.

Figure 1. Value of issued versus redeemed vouchers, 2016 (Q3) to 2018 (Q3)

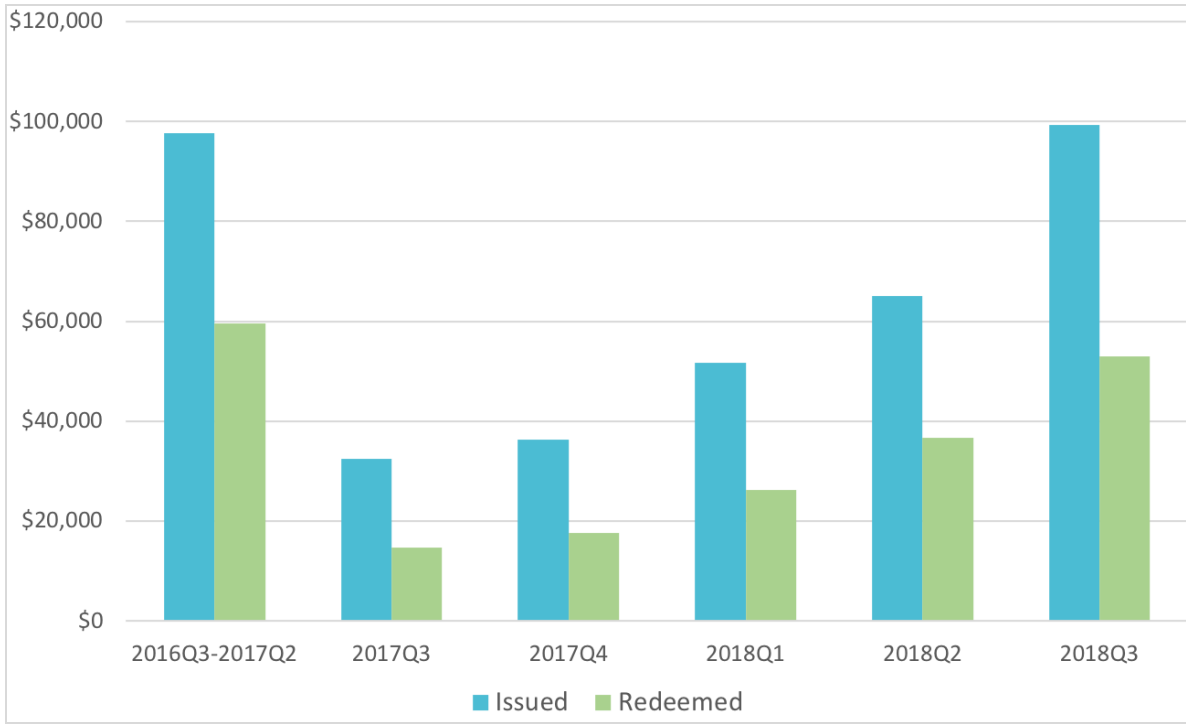


Figure 2. Overall redemption rates by provider, 2016 (Q3) to 2018 (Q3).

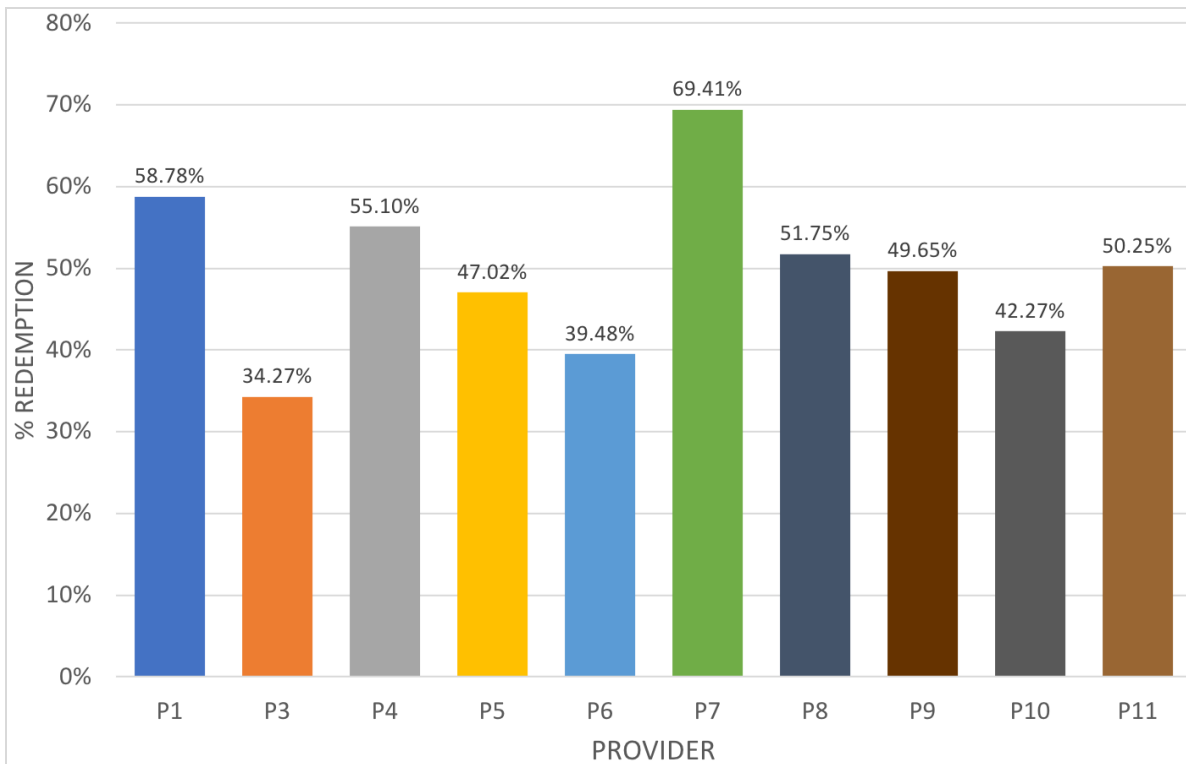


Figure 3. Value of issued versus redeemed vouchers by provider, 2016 (Q3) to 2018 (Q3).

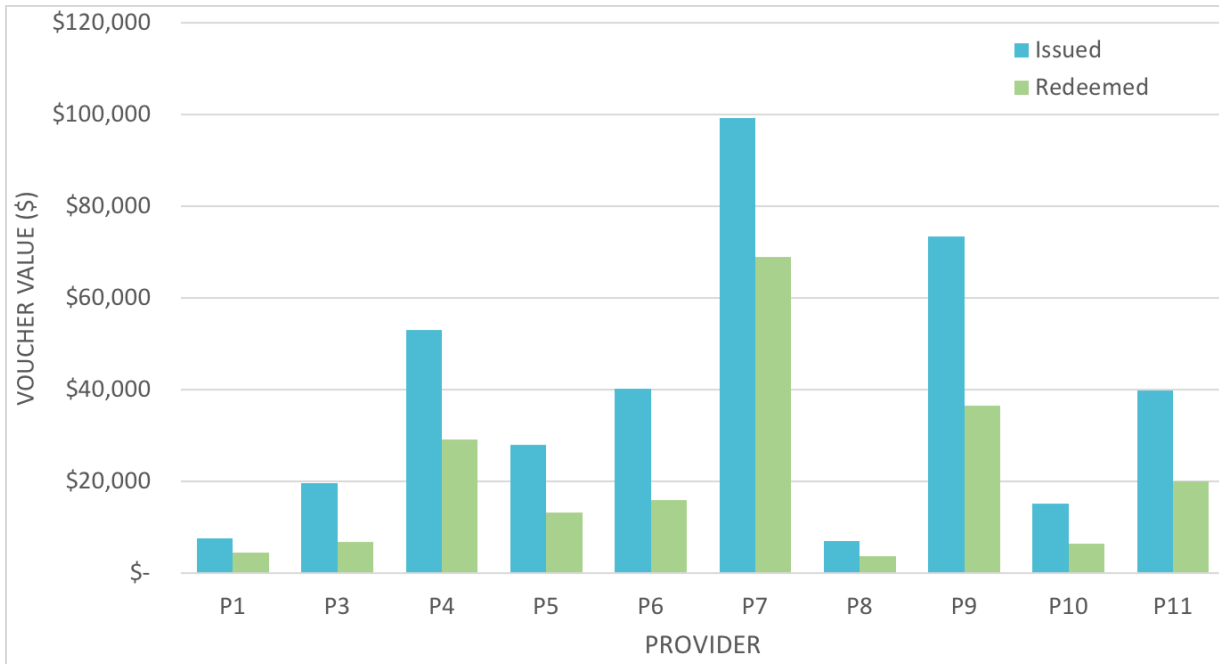


Figure 4. Quarterly redemption rates by provider, 2016 (Q3) to 2018 (Q3).

