**The Doctor’s Orders: Wholesome Wave brings Fruit and Vegetables Prescriptions to Los Angeles**

Obesity has been on the rise in the United States for decades, and in Los Angeles County, obesity rates have risen across race and income, and diet-related chronic diseases such as Type II Diabetes, Hypertension, and High Cholesterol have continued to raise accordingly. There are a myriad of reasons that are contributing to this trend, but one of the common causes is low consumption of nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables. In the 2020 Food System Dashboard, we also see that consumption of fruits and vegetables has decreased across groups as well. Accessibility and affordability of fresh produce is just one barrier for many Americans, and one that Wholesome Wave seeks to address.

Wholesome Wave has a two-pronged approach to getting fruits and vegetables into the hands of more people. First, they partnered with Eisner Pediatrics through their Wholesome Wave Fruit and Veggie Rx program to hand out vouchers for fruits and vegetables to children and family that qualified. These were redeemable at various locations in the local market. Some participants were also attended nutritional discussions and cooking demonstrations through partnership with Groceryships.

Doubling the value of SNAP benefits for fruits and vegetables, also known as Food Stamps or CalFresh in the state of California, is the second step Wholesome Wave has taken to improving the affordability of produce to participants. These produce incentives are redeemable at Target stores and a handful of local stores and farmers markets. In Los Angeles, the redemption rates were markedly higher in farmers markets. Over the course of 2017, the Farmers for All working group at the Los Angeles Food Policy Council called or visited every farmers market in Los Angeles to confirm that they were accepting CalFresh. Buying produce at farmers markets is a strong way to reconnect residents with the bounty produced within the ten counties of the Los Angeles Foodshed. These vendors offer the freshest food available, and are often better able to cater to local tastes and minimize packaging waste.

When asked about the unique challenges and advantages of Wholesome Wave’s expansion in the Los Angeles market, Ashma Basmyat was thoughtful. One of the great gifts of Los Angeles is the diversity of its communities. There are people from over 140 countries speaking 224 languages living within the city limits.[[1]](#footnote-0) Basmyat noted that this makes meeting the cultural food preferences difficult at times. At other points, there can be a language barrier between the doctors that can prescribe Wholesome Wave Rx, and the population that would benefit from them.

Addressing these concerns will take time, money, and partnerships. Continuing to expand Wholesome Wave’s network to markets that serve local populations with produce tailored to their preferences is one step. Working with communities to adjust the nutrition education component such that it is relevant and utilizable is another. The Los Angeles market is strong, shared Basmyat, with some of the highest redemption rates in the country. Wholesome Wave is continuing to invest in these communities, and seek new ways to address nutrition-related disease through food affordability and accessibility.

1. American Community Survey, 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)