

# Issue Brief

## Foods Deserts & Access to Healthy Foods

### Overview

**Q: What is a Food Desert?** It's a community with little or no access to fresh, healthy foods—foods that make up the full range of a healthy diet. **Residents in many areas, such as Miami and a lot of Florida, do not have supermarkets in their neighborhoods, forcing these families to rely on unhealthy fast food and snacks found at a corner quick market.**

Many Florida residents, including hundreds of thousands of children, live in lower-income communities underserved by supermarkets. While supermarkets are not the only answer for promoting healthy eating, they provide the greatest variety of healthy, affordable food for our residents while creating jobs and spurring economic development. In addition, a growing body of evidence shows that an increased presence of supermarkets in underserved communities helps people live healthier lives.



This isn't just an urban issue. It affects our rural areas, too. There are areas in Rural Florida where there might not be a grocery store in an entire county. The result leads to undermining the health and well-being of these families—especially their growing children.

**Q: How can we address the issue?** We need to reduce economic barriers, provide healthy choices, and most importantly, educate local consumers about the benefits of healthy eating.



### American Heart Association's Position

**What is the American Heart Association doing?** The American Heart Association teaming up with Florida Grocers, the Retail Federation, Community Health Foundations and others to determine the properly targeted grocery access areas. This task force will be comprised of experts representing the leadership from civic, health, food retail, economic development, government and philanthropic organizations. The task force will begin to meet to explore barriers to supermarket and grocery store development in neighborhoods where residents lack access to nutritious foods.

From a report to be developed by this task force, recommendations will call upon state and local governments to prioritize grocery store and supermarket development in underserved communities. The research will indicate that people who live in communities without a supermarket suffer from disproportionately high rates of obesity, diabetes and other diet-related health problems. This situation is pressing; Florida spends an estimated \$6.7 billion each year treating obesity related diseases. Providing Floridians with greater access to nutritious, affordable food will help alleviate these public health concerns.