

# East L.A. Markets Refurbished to Improve Latino Health

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A program in East Los Angeles in California aims to reduce the risk of heart disease among Latinos by giving a nutritional makeover to four of the area's corner markets, the Los Angeles Times reports. East L.A.'s population is 97 percent Latino, and such markets are often social centers for the local Latino community.

Three years ago, the county's health department surveyed 1.3 million of the area's adults and found that 25 percent reported being diagnosed with high cholesterol and over 30 percent reported being diagnosed with hypertension, both of which are often connected with obesity. Researchers with the program—which is run by the UCLA-USC Center for Population Health and Health Disparities, and funded by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute—described the area as a “food swamp” where healthy eating locations were outnumbered by fast food joints.

Prior to the makeover, the markets' displays focused on junk food from such corporate giants as Coca-Cola, Frito-Lay and Pepsi. This is because distributors typically offer a discount on merchandise to market owners in exchange for putting such displays at the forefront of the store. “These stores are not designed by the owner,” said Nathan Cheng, a small-business consultant hired by UCLA for the project. “They're designed by the distributors.”

For the makeover, the stores have been repainted, rearranged to provide wider aisles, and stocked with fresh produce. The renovated markets are also making an effort to connect directly with their customers in matters of nutrition, including learning Spanish and offering monthly cooking classes and personal recipe advice.

“You're never going to make money on produce,” Cheng told the owners of Yash, one of the four revamped markets. “It's...a service you're providing your community.” Nonetheless, Yash—which has attracted new customers since the makeover—showed a 25 percent increase in sales in the last quarter of 2011 over the same period of the previous year.

To read the Times article, [click here](#).

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