

# Chicago, It's Time to Desert Food Deserts: Health Concerns and Policy Suggestions

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## Introduction

As the effects of food deserts continue throughout Chicago, the opportunities for residents in particular neighborhoods to buy quality, affordable, and fresh food in close proximity to them dwindles. This research contends that the distinct racial and socio-economic divides in Chicago neighborhoods create low food access and disproportionate food qualities between neighborhoods. Additionally, this trend is linked to health concerns, in low-income neighborhoods with predominantly people of color as residents. Despite these clear correlations, Chicago's government policies have failed to create effective change when it comes to these problems. As a result, a multidimensional approach that emphasizes community involvement is needed to remedy the inequities.

## Learning Objectives

- Investigating the historical origins of the current food desert problem in Chicago
- Noting the health ramifications that food deserts have
- Reflecting on the past attempts and failures of public policies that were concerned with food deserts
- Analyzing how areas in Chicago with accessible food resources compare to areas without accessible healthy food options

## Background

From 2007 to 2014, the number of supermarkets and grocery stores increased greatly in Chicago. Despite that, improvements were not seen for black low-income communities, which continued to have limited access to food. Yet where healthy and diverse options of food are not seen, a high density of fast-food chains are. Since 2014, the disparities have increased, with more food stores closing in the Southside. Now, these issues and inequities are being amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

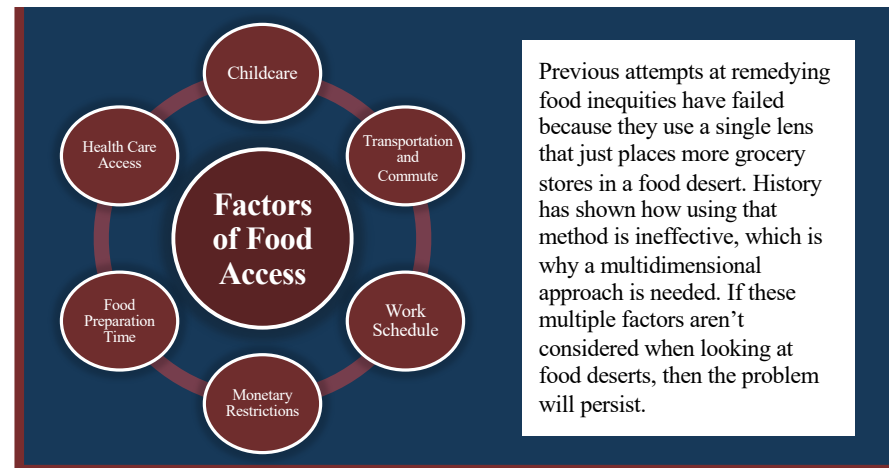
## Ongoing Issue

Despite Chicago's politicians and mayors claiming for the past decade that they would fix the inequities in food security in the city, the issues persist. Impacting health and mortality rates, it is no coincidence then that the areas that have food deserts also have life expectancy rates many years lower than areas with high rates of access to healthy foods. These disparities are caused by unequal resource distribution. Additionally, health issues are created for these populations. Instances of diabetes and obesity are seen at much higher rates in food deserts.

## Conclusion

While many policies have aimed to just increase the amount of grocery retailers in low access areas, those policies have been unsuccessful. What is being seen as a more beneficial option is increasing the amount and types of options for accessibility, such as community gardens, farmers markets, food assistance programs, healthy restaurants, and food pantries. Those options allow for low prices, and more importantly, grow community involvement and participation. This project is extremely important to the Chicago community as a whole, because growing awareness of this issue has the potential to benefit the affected communities. However, it is important to acknowledge that food deserts are only one part of Chicago's structural racism.

## Multidimensional Approach



## Sources

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