



A Cross-Cultural Collaboration to Improve Healthy Retail Practices in *Tiendas*: The Shop Healthy Iowa Initiative

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1. Background

Chronic diseases, such as obesity and diabetes, disproportionately affect Latinx populations as compared to white populations (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2015). For example, estimates suggest that Latinx individuals are 50% more likely to die from diabetes, they have higher rates of uncontrolled hypertension, and higher obesity rates compared to white populations (CDC, 2015). Latinx diets being low in fruits further exacerbates their risk of suffering from chronic diseases (CDC, 2013). Latinx households are more likely to be food insecure than white households and purchase more calorie-dense, high fat and sodium, and low fiber foods (Trust for America's Health & Robert Wood Johnson Foundation [RWJF], n.d.; Coleman-Jensen, Rabbit, Gregory, & Singh, 2016). Part of this insecurity is due to poor community nutrition environments with Latinx populations having low access to nutritious foods which increases health disparities in health outcomes and behaviors among these populations (Trust for America's Health & RWJF, n.d.). To address these disparities, policy and environmental solutions need to address the low availability and affordability of healthy products in Latinx communities (Trust for America's Health & RWJF, n.d.).

Further complicating the issue of food accessibility in rural, Midwestern new destination communities (or communities where Latinx populations have not traditionally settled), is the fact that as a result of the current rhetoric that portrays Latinxs as criminals and illegals, the majority Anglo population may perceive them with antipathy and hostility (Lichter & Johnson, 2009; Maldonado, 2017). This stigma can threaten Latinx community traditions and cultural values, which, in turn, may lead to social isolation and loss of sense of culture (Crowley & Lichter, 2009). *Tiendas*, or Latin American corner stores, are locations that serve as cultural hubs and trusted places for Latinx individuals, selling traditional foods and products from countries of origin (Zarrugh, 2007). They are an avenue to promote healthy retail strategies amongst Latinx populations to build a culture and community around healthy eating through culturally salient interventions that promote and increase access to healthy food (Gittelsohn et al., 2012; Ayala, Baquero, Laraia, Ji, & Linnan, 2013). However, *tiendas* commonly have limited healthy food options and correspond with higher consumption of high-fat and high-sugar foods (Gittelsohn, Rowan, & Gadhoke,

2012). Owners of *tiendas* can benefit from the economic advantages that fruits and vegetables provide—as these foods, if cared for properly and quickly sold, produce higher gross profit margins for stores (Cook, 2010), while mutually benefitting the Latinx populations they serve through increased access to healthy foods. Thus, the purpose of the current paper is to describe the development of the partnership between an academic institution, state public health department, local public health practitioners, and Latinx store owners that aimed to promote healthy eating among Latinx individuals in a rural Midwestern state.

2. Shop Healthy Iowa Overview

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) supported the Shop Healthy Iowa (SHI) program with funds from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention State Public Health Actions to Prevent and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity, and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health and Iowa Nutrition Network SNAP-Ed. This program started as a pilot project to prevent chronic diseases among Iowa Latinx populations through the promotion of healthy foods in *tiendas*. IDPH reached out to the initial partnering research institution to create and test a program grounded on evidence-based healthy retail interventions. The program developed suggested the use of a train the trainer model to implement structural changes, and marketing strategies to promote the purchasing of healthy foods in the Latinx community.

SHI created a tool kit and training guide for program trainers and *tienda* managers grounded in evidence-based retail strategies such as structural changes and supportive marketing. Examples of structural changes include relocating healthy foods to more visible locations, grouping healthy foods in the same location, using baskets to organize and make produce more attractive, creating healthy coolers and healthy checkout lanes, and increasing the desirability of these foods (Lubischer, 2013; Ayala et al., 2013; Martin & Born, 2009; Glanz, Bader, & Iyer, 2012). Supportive marketing strategies included using signage, posters, shelf tags, and price tags that promote healthy foods through the provision of nutritional information, health facts, and recipes (Ayala et al., 2013; Martin & Born, 2009; Glanz, Bader, & Iyer, 2012).

3. Implementation of SHI

With the initial program developed, including a toolkit with implementation information and instructions for local implementers or Local Project Coordinators (LPCs) and a training guide to train *tienda* managers on healthy retail initiatives, partnering organizations selected two communities. Eligibility criteria included: a relatively large Latinx population, and existing initiatives centered on improved healthy retail and economic impact concurrently happening in the communities. A natural community partner emerged in the Local Public Health Department (LPHD) of the communities due to the priorities of the county's Health Improvement Plan. A LPC from the LPHD headed the communication and logistical details for initiating the SHI pilot program.

3.1 Phase One: Initial Pilot of SHI

Once *tiendas* agreed to participate in the pilot, project researchers collected baseline data and the LPCs trained *tienda* managers using the developed guide. After the training on effective marketing strategies and structural changes to promote healthy retail, the LPC and *tienda* managers discussed the potential for tailoring the marketing strategies and structural changes in order to fit the demands of the *tiendas'* clientele. *Tienda* managers provided feedback on the feasibility of the suggested strategies, which LPCs reported back to other SHI collaborators. The *tienda* changes occurred using a re-iterative adaptation process where the manager and LPC agreed upon initial store alterations. IDPH and the researchers provided technical assistance to ensure program fidelity and record progress on process indicators for the program. Research staff conducted follow-up interviews with managers to assess the impact of the intervention and input on future areas of improvement in the designed SHI program.

3.2. Phase 2: Re-Iterative Adaptation After the Dissemination of SHI

Research staff made adaptations to the training guide based on input given in meetings by the LPC, LPHD, and IDPH as well as through feedback provided by the *tienda* managers. These changes improved applicability of the store-training guide for future program implementation. A new partnership with Iowa State Extension and Outreach—Community and Economic Development (ISUEO-CED) emerged. This was a natural partnership due to ISUEO's extensive network across all 99 counties in Iowa and

their CED's focus on Latino small business development. As the program has continued to expand into additional communities across the state, the ISUEO-CED specialists have close relationships with the intervention *tienda* managers and uphold involvement of the managers to ensure that adaptations best meet the needs of the *tienda* managers, staff, and customers.

The cross-cultural partnership continues between stakeholders, LPCs, and *tienda* managers to further provide insights for future program adaptation. The continued collection of *tienda's* purchasing data of fruits and vegetables, customer feedback surveys, conducted manager interviews, and process evaluation information collected by LPCs guides the adaptation and monitors the progress of the program.

3.3 Tienda Recruitment and Retention

Since 2015, the SHI partnership collaborated with eighteen *tiendas* from nine different communities across the state to participate in the training, implementation, and evaluation activities involved in the program. Of the total number of *tiendas* recruited (n= 18), sixteen completed the 6-month intervention and two *tiendas* were lost to follow-up.

3.4 Partnering for Evaluation

A large focus of the intervention and the partnerships involved in the SHI program has included collecting evaluative measures of program success. We worked with *tienda* managers to collect store purchasing data for fruits and vegetables, manager interviews, and customer feedback. The program collected all the purchase receipts that the stores could provide before, during, and after the intervention period. Research staff collected twenty-eight (fifteen pre and thirteen post) manager interviews and 227 customer surveys. Data is not presented in this paper.

3.5 Adaptations for Success of SHI

With feedback from partners, *tienda* managers, and customers, modifications to the program occurred that enhanced future adaptations in *tiendas* recruited at a later date. These adaptations included more achievable structural change options and easier to use marketing materials as part of the *tienda* manager training and the addition of cultural humility training (i.e. "considering a person's culture from the individual's specific view and to be aware and humble enough to 'say that they do not know when they do not know'.") (Isaacson, 2014; Tevalon &

Murray-García, 1998). Furthermore, CED specialists became the implementers of the program due to their skill set, which best met the expressed needs of recruited *tienda* managers.

4. Practical Implications

4.1 Adaptations to *Tienda* Manager Training Through Manager Input

An important component of SHI has been its re-iterative and adaptive nature where manager input provided much of the guidance as to how the store manager training program components needed adaptation to meet *tienda* needs. Some positive *tienda* manager feedback from the program included that “everything was beneficial,” “sales increased as a result of SHI,” that SHI, “was interesting and helped...will continue to grow my business.” Managers indicated that some of the most interesting and helpful components of the training were the nutritional information, the fruits/vegetables stocking knowledge, and the information on structural changes. Due to this feedback, the store manager training retained these beneficial components and LPCs had better direction on the most relevant and engaging parts of the training for the managers.

On the other hand, managers also provided constructive feedback of the store-training. These included the need for more functional/durable labels, more visible poster displays, the provision of recipe cards at food demonstrations in the *tiendas*, and the need for financial assistance to be more relevant to the *tienda*'s actual needs versus what was purchasable by grant funding. Modifications to accommodate this feedback included changing the types of labels purchased for the program to include different options for label material and a variety of clipping attachment options. A wider range of posters and banners was available on the possible list of purchasable marketing materials presented to the managers to make the program more adaptable to the needs of each *tienda*. Before holding food demonstrations, LPC staff printed recipe cards to provide to customers. Though the SHI funding guidelines were unalterable, the LPCs continue to support and educate *tienda* managers on additional local, state, and government funding opportunities to cover *tienda* improvement costs that the grant was unable to fund.

4.2 Modifications to the LPC Training

Through manager feedback it became apparent that the LPC training guide should include sections on both cultural humility and economic development to better meet the needs and goals of the Latinx *tienda* managers. Through the addition of content related to these two relevant topics, trained and future LPCs of the program have resources to help them foster and build a trusting relationship with the managers of recruited *tiendas* and to assist these managers in the development of their businesses through the tools the SHI program provides.

4.3 Cultural Humility Training for LPCs

The trust the SHI program LPCs developed prior to the program, throughout the program, and maintained after the program has been essential to the success and continued impact of the SHI program in the intervention *tiendas* and communities. In order to maintain this trust, adapting the program to the needs of each *tienda* and community is necessary for the continued acceptance of the program (Bartholomew Eldredge, Markham, Ruitter, Fernández, Kok, & Parcel, 2016). In one of the LPC's own words, “you can't expect store owners to make changes to their store layout or implement signage or even believe in the program without taking the necessary time to talk with them and build trust for successful implementation. That means starting early and visiting often so the stores get to know you”.

For SHI, a key component to maintaining trust is the cultural humility piece of the LPC training, which helps the LPCs understand and practice important trust building actions throughout their interactions with *tienda* managers. As a result of the partnership created, the original definition of cultural humility naturally evolved to include the following aspects: 1) understanding and being knowledgeable of a culture outside of one's own, and 2) requiring individuals to be responsible for, sensitive to, and acknowledge their own pre-determined biases based on cultural norms (Levi, 2009; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Isaacson, 2014). Practicing cultural humility was key for establishing open relationships between LPCs and *tienda* managers in SHI. This perspective leads to a more open dialogue where community members (i.e. managers) engage in program activities and outcomes and public health practitioners (i.e. LPCs) have increased capacity to make beneficial program changes (Minkler, 2012).

4.4 Economic Development Training for LPCs

The emphasis of the SHI program on economic development improves the capacity of the *tienda* managers and their respective *tiendas*. Training and education, investment in the appropriate *tienda* equipment to maintain fruits and vegetables, and provision of marketing materials for fruits and vegetables, are all key to the success of small-scale *tiendas* (Langellier et al., 2013; The Food Trust, 2011), particularly in a rural Midwestern state. Due to the potential for higher profits, selling produce can be economically beneficial for small-scale stores. Though this potential exists, many small-scale *tiendas* do not have adequate equipment, knowledge, and training to effectively sell fresh produce (The Food Trust, 2011). SHI works to provide *tiendas* the necessary equipment and resources to improve their bottom line.

5. Conclusions and Next Steps

A community-engaged collaborative partnership involving researchers, public health practitioners, *tienda* managers, and customer input, produced a culturally relevant and economically beneficial healthy retail program. The program's adaptability, which uses a re-iterative feedback loop, continues to modify the program to fit the desired needs of involved managers and public health practitioners. The program plans to continue expansion in new communities throughout the state.

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