

Cuyahoga County Grocery Store Assessment, 2023

Executive Summary:

High profile grocery store closures in working class neighborhoods have galvanized community efforts and political will to address grocery store gaps – albeit in a reactive manner. Grocery stores are an essential part of our communities, providing access to food, medicine, jobs, household items and banking services. Their relevance merits a robust focus on policy solutions.

This Grocery Store Assessment is a collaboration among public sector entities and neighborhood leaders to better understand the grocery store landscape, learn from implementation efforts and develop proactive policy solutions.

There are 223 small, mid and large-scale grocery stores and 11,000 grocery workers in Cuyahoga County. About 14% (178,000) of county residents are lower-income AND lack a grocery store in their neighborhood – *what we characterize as a food desert*. Families living in these locations are also less likely to own a vehicle.

Considerations resulting from community dialogue on grocery store issues:

- How might we better anticipate grocery store closures?
- Are there strategies that government can employ to stabilize existing stores?
- How might we use community benefit agreements among grocers, community and government?

This report was organized by the Cuyahoga County Board of Health, Cuyahoga County Planning Commission, Cleveland Department of Public Health and Cleveland State University's Maxine Goodman Levin School of Urban Affairs



Maxine Goodman Levin
School of Urban Affairs

LEVIN COLLEGE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND EDUCATION

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Introduction

Grocery stores are an essential part of our communities, providing access to food, medicine, jobs, household items and banking services. They help to anchor surrounding businesses and are community gathering places. In Cuyahoga County, their relevance has been highlighted by community outcry following grocery store closures and strong community participation to find solutions. Examples include the closure of two Giant Eagles in 2017 on both the East and West side of Cleveland. In both instances, communities organized forums, protests, and strategies to address the impending closures. At that time, the mayor of Cleveland wrote a letter to Giant Eagle requesting they reconsider, additionally there was significant media coverage of the issue.¹ Recently, Dave's Supermarket announced the closure of their Collinwood location causing a flurry of media coverage and concern from community members, policy makers and other stakeholders.² In each of these examples hundreds of residents engaged with the issue. Grocery store issues resonate across Cuyahoga County and particularly in under-resourced communities. The closure of no other business causes more community turmoil than the closure of a grocery store.

The 2023 Cuyahoga County Grocery Store Assessment is the latest update in a series of efforts that began in 2010 to provide a snapshot of the grocery store landscape along with sociodemographic and health outcome data. This information can inform strategic approaches to improving grocery store access, individual and community health, addressing issues such as food security.

Food security is defined as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life”.³ Food security encompasses three fundamental aspects – availability, access, and utilization. Each of these can be understood as the availability of adequate quantities of nutritious food, access to sufficient resources to obtain appropriate food to maintain a nutritious diet, and utilization of food for an adequate diet.⁴ Any absence of even one of these criteria results in food insecurity.

Grocery Store Landscape in Cuyahoga County

There are 223 grocery stores in Cuyahoga County. To arrive at this number, 1200 food retail establishments were reviewed to determine which could reasonably provide for a family's

¹ [Giant Eagle Buckeye store set to close \(callandpost.com\)](https://www.callandpost.com/story/news/local/2017/05/11/giant-eagle-buckeye-store-set-to-close/1028117001/)

² [A grocery store on Cleveland's East Side is closing; Residents say they're stressed by a new food desert | Ideastream Public Media](https://www.ideastream.com/story/news/local/2023/03/14/a-grocery-store-on-cleveland-s-east-side-is-closing-residents-say-they-re-stressed-by-a-new-food-desert/7048117001/)

³ USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) 2022. “Food Security in the U.S.”. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/#:~:text=Food%20security%20means%20access%20by,in%20U.S.%20households%20and%20communities>

⁴ Timmer, C. Peter. 2012. "Behavioral Dimensions of Food Security." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109 (31): 12315-12320.

nutritional and grocery needs. Our goal was to inventory all small grocery stores, and large supermarkets. Gas stations, corner stores and dollar stores were excluded from this assessment because of their limited offerings. Examples of small grocery stores include: Discount Drug Marts, Almadina Import (11550 Lorain Ave. Cleveland), Kabas African Market (4141 Lee Rd. Cleveland) and Farmer Jones Market (16701 Broadway Ave. Maple Heights). Examples of mid to large scale stores include: Giant Eagle, Aldi, Dave’s Supermarket, Marc’s and La Plaza Supermarket (13609 Lakewood Heights Blvd. Cleveland).

For this assessment small grocery stores are included because of their relevance to neighborhoods and capacity to provide for a family’s healthy food needs. They may be ethnic grocery stores or immigrant owned business, providing culturally relevant staples. These smaller stores may derive greater benefit from government or philanthropic funding and programmatic support compared to national or regional chains. These small grocers can also play a vital role in the local economy, providing local economic benefits to the communities they serve.

Since the last Supermarket Assessment in 2019, several larger scale stores have closed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Supermarkets that have closed since 2019

Facility Name	Address	City
ASMAN & SONS MARKET	6501 SAINT CLAIR AVENUE	CLEVELAND
DAVE’S SUPERMARKET	15900 LAKESHORE BLVD	CLEVELAND
DAVE’S SUPERMARKET	12438 CEDAR RD	CLEVELAND HEIGHTS
**FARMER JONES MARKET	16701 BROADWAY AVE	MAPLE HEIGHTS
VIETNAM MARKET	5506 DETROIT AVE	CLEVELAND
*ZAGARA’S MARKETPLACE	1940 LEE RD	CLEVELAND HEIGHTS

***Dave’s Supermarket re-opened** a grocery store at the previous Zagara’s Marketplace in Cleveland Heights.⁵

****Farmer Jones Market re-opened** through a coalition effort following a closure related to economic challenges from the COVID pandemic. The Market is now managed by Rid-All Green Partnership – a non-profit environmental justice organization.⁶

There are several projected grocery store openings including a 40,000 sq. foot Meijer supermarket near E. 105th and Cedar Ave. as part of a mixed use project with 200 apartments.⁷ An organization affiliated with Simon’s Supermarket purchased the 45,000 sq. foot building previously occupied by Dave’s Supermarket in Collinwood (15900 Lakeshore Blvd.), however,

⁵ [Zagara’s Market closes after nearly 100 years of family-owned service \(news5cleveland.com\)](https://news5cleveland.com/story/news/local/2020/05/14/zagara-s-market-closes-after-nearly-100-years-of-family-owned-service/5564440002/)

⁶ [Rid-All Green Partnership tapped to run Farmer Jones Market in Maple Heights – The Land \(thelandcle.org\)](https://thelandcle.org/2020/05/14/rid-all-green-partnership-tapped-to-run-farmer-jones-market-in-maple-heights/)

⁷ [Ground broken for apartments and Meijer store – NEOtrans \(neo-trans.blog\)](https://neo-trans.blog/2020/05/14/ground-broken-for-apartments-and-meijer-store/)

it is not clear if a grocery store will reopen at this site.⁸

Coalition organizing efforts that focus on local ownership and community participation can be effective in the formation and stability of critical food access points. Efforts in the Central Kinsman Neighborhood are underway to organize a food co-operative and the coalition recently released a feasibility study.⁹ Residents in Dayton, Ohio opened a grocery co-operative called Gem City Market in 2021 which offers a model of community and worker participation in the development and governance of a local grocery store.¹⁰

Grocery Store Jobs

Retail workers across the country are more likely to be women (56%) and statistically are more likely to live in poverty.¹¹ In 2018, 15.3% of retail workers relied on Medicaid compared to 9% of the total workforce. Grocery stores are significant employers and often provide jobs to nearby residents. The grocery store industry employs 2.7 million people whose average annual wage is \$25,000.¹² Grocery stores are more likely to be unionized (16%) when compared to the rest of the private sector workforce at 6%.¹³ In 2019, unionized retail workers earned \$730 per week compared to \$670 for non-union retail workers.¹⁴ The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) is a labor union that represents about 835,000 grocery workers. UFCW Local 880 is the Cleveland area union and represents workers at Giant Eagle, Heinen's, Dave's and Meijer to name a few.¹⁵ In Cuyahoga County, there are over 11,500 grocery store workers.

COVID-19 Context

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact lives and communities. Its effects can be felt across grocery stores in Cuyahoga County through the reduction or elimination of self-service buffets, salad bars, and prepared food due to staff shortages and concerns of viral contamination. Some fresh-food options have been replaced with pre-packaged items. Quality and availability of many produce and other items have been negatively impacted by supply chain issues. Some closures listed above were attributed in-part to economic challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data and Key Findings

Below is a Cuyahoga County Grocery Store Map that includes 223 store locations. The areas in

⁸ [As vacant grocery property is sold, Dave's Collinwood customers give feedback on shuttle service – The Land \(thelandcle.org\)](#)

⁹ [Feasibility Study - Central Kinsman Food Cooperative Planning Initiative.pdf - Google Drive](#)

¹⁰ Gem City Market Website: www.gemcitymarket.com

¹¹ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/09/profile-of-the-retail-workforce.html>

¹² <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/2-point-7-million-grocery-store-workers-in-september-2019.htm>

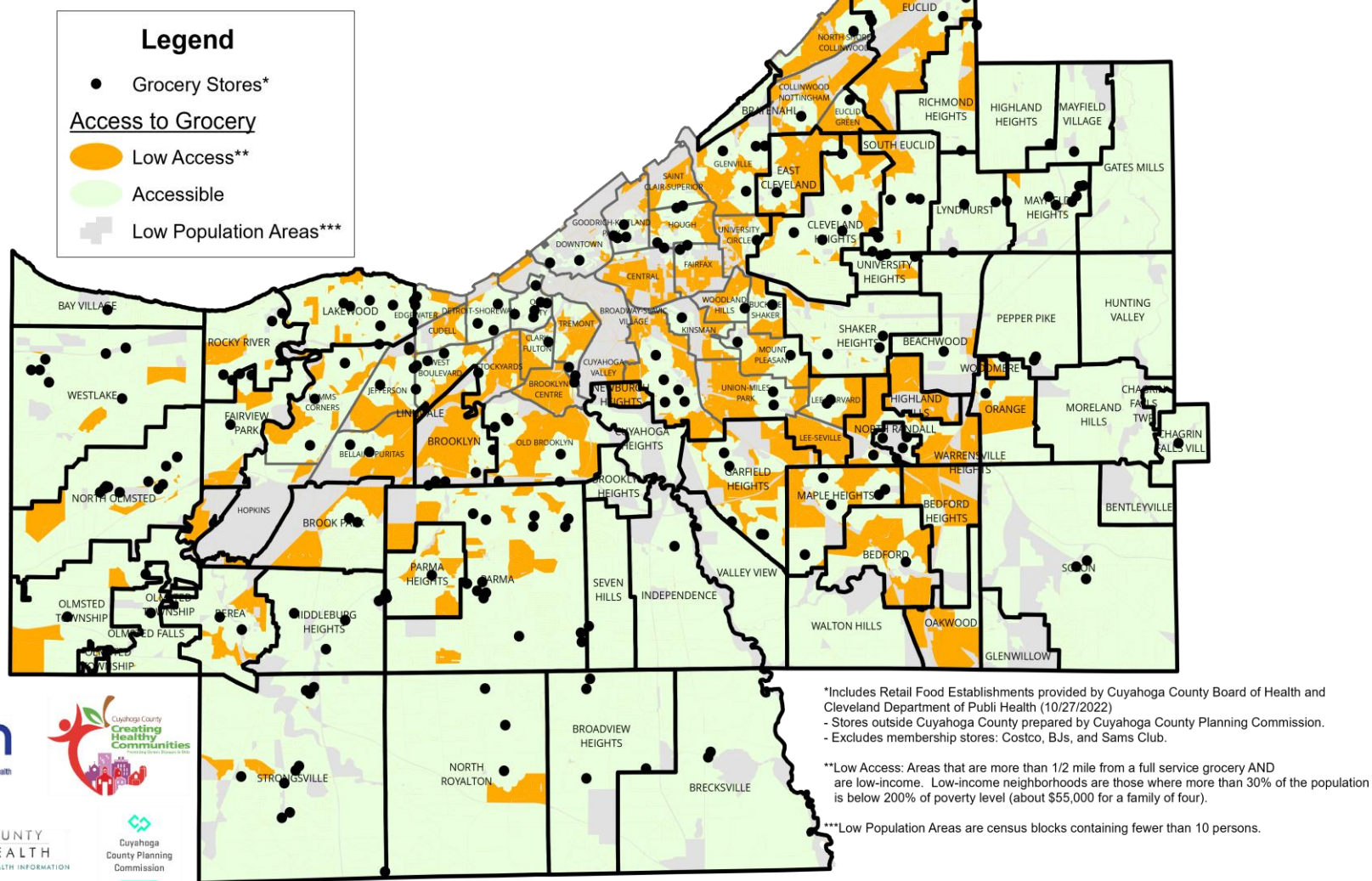
¹³ [Grocery Unions under the Gun in New York City and the Nation - New Labor Forum \(cuny.edu\)](#)

¹⁴ [Retail workers in unions reap higher wages even as U.S. organizers suffer setbacks | Reuters](#)

¹⁵ [Partners | UFCW 880 \(ufcwlocal880.org\)](#)

Figure 1. Grocery store access map with 223 locations

Grocery Store Access Cuyahoga County, 2022

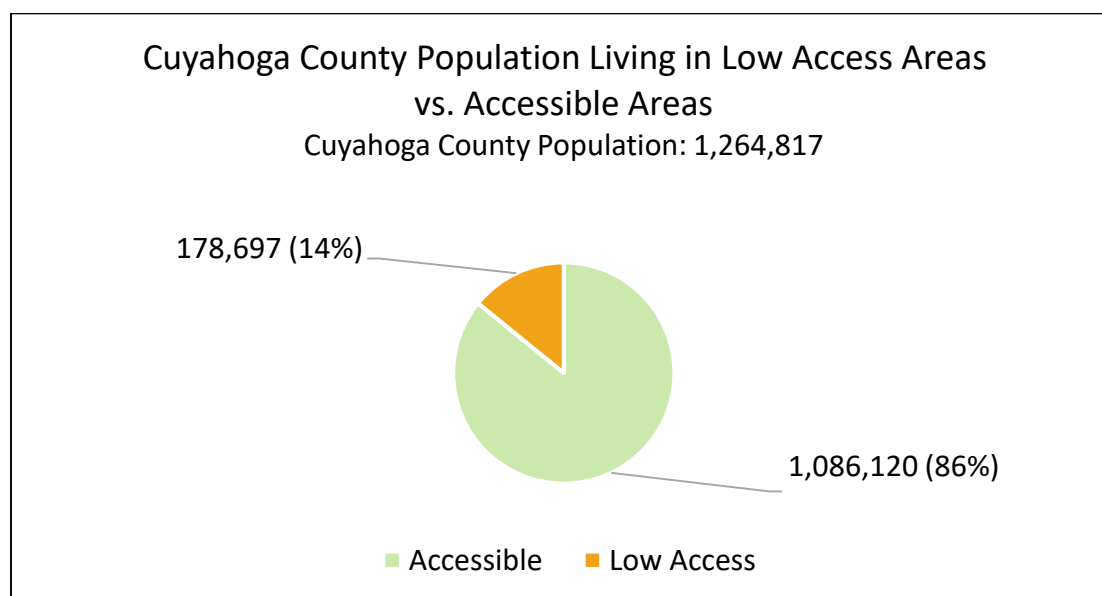


orange are considered “low access” which means that most residents live more than 0.5 miles from a grocery store AND experience higher rates of poverty. Residents of areas in green either live closer than 0.5 miles from a grocery store OR have higher incomes. Food desert “regions of the country often feature large proportions of households with low incomes, inadequate access to transportation, and a limited number of food retailers providing fresh produce and healthy groceries for affordable prices”.¹⁶ In terms of strategy – implementing stores in orange areas or stabilizing stores close to orange areas is relevant to improving food access.

Poverty is a significant determinant of low access to grocery stores. Families that achieve economic stability of >200% of the poverty level (\$55,000/year for a family of 4) are more likely to be able to secure healthy foods. Since our 2019 assessment, there was an increase in neighborhoods with access to grocery stores in-part because we included smaller grocery stores resulting in 223 stores compared to just 162 in the 2019 assessment. Also, a decrease in poverty from 36.8% (2014) of the population to 34.4% (2020) was a factor in improving grocery access. Specifically, fewer census blocks met the low-income food desert categorization of ***more than 30% of households below 200% of the poverty level*** dropping from 7,067 census blocks in 2014 to 6,658 in 2020. Increasing income for workers and families is relevant to improving access to grocery stores.

About 14% or 178,697 Cuyahoga County residents live in a neighborhood considered a food desert while 86% or 1,086,120 Cuyahoga County residents live in neighborhoods considered accessible to grocery stores (Figure 2).

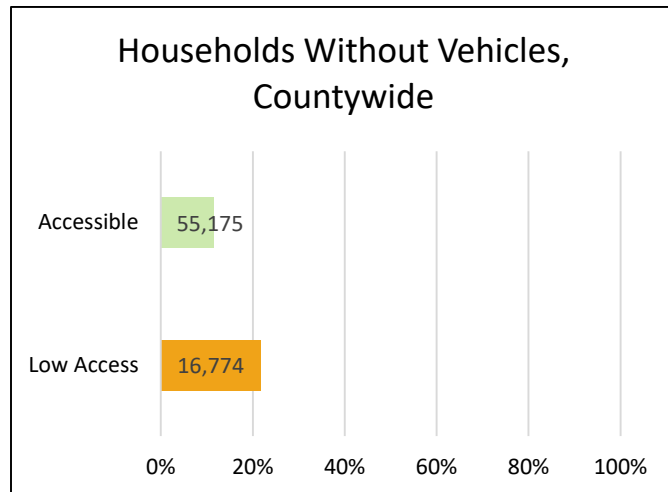
Figure 2. Percentage of residents who live in areas with “low access” to grocery stores



¹⁶ https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/45014/30940_err140.pdf

“Low Access” means a neighborhood is geographically distant from a grocery store AND has higher rates of poverty. Residents in grocery store accessible areas either live close to a grocery store OR have economic stability (\$55,000 for a family of 4).

Figure 3. Households without vehicles in “low access” areas compared to “accessible” areas



About 22% of households with low access to grocery stores have no vehicle compared to 11% of households with access.

Key takeaway: *Households with less access to grocery stores are almost twice as likely to ALSO not have a vehicle.*

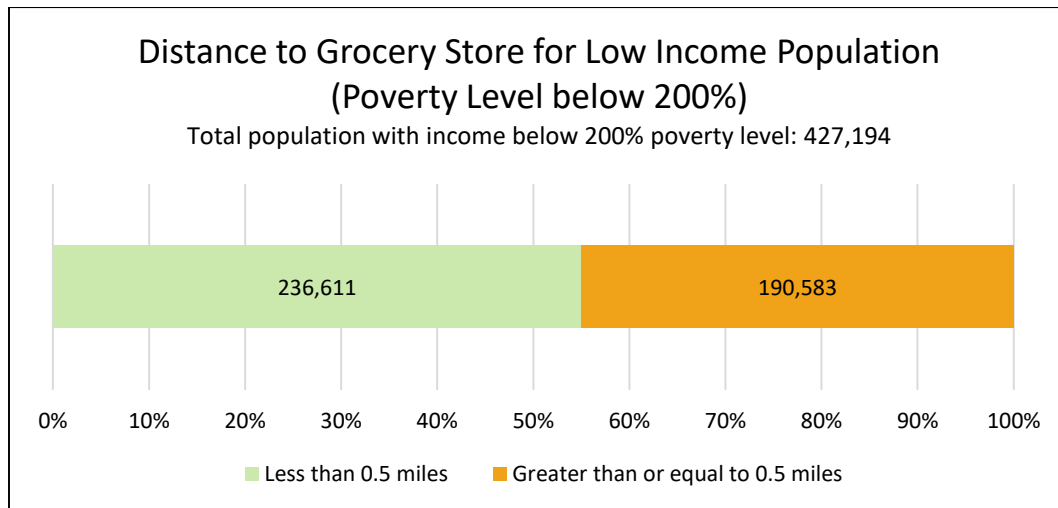
Transportation issues have loomed large in the discussion regarding the Dave’s Supermarket closure in Collinwood. About half of the households in the area lack a

vehicle and residents of Euclid Beach Apartments across the street expressed the importance of being able to walk to Dave’s Supermarket. There is an RTA bus stop in front of the closed store. To alleviate acute grocery access concerns following the Collinwood closure, Dave’s Supermarket implemented a paratransit service to shuttle Euclid Beach residents to their Supermarket at Shore Center Plaza in Euclid.¹⁷

Figure 4 captures the percentage of lower income residents who live in close proximity to a grocery store. Among the 427,194 Cuyahoga County residents with incomes below the poverty threshold – 190,583 live farther than 0.5 miles from a grocery store (less access) whereas 236,611 live within half a mile of a grocery store. Implementing grocery stores in neighborhoods that are shaded orange (Figure 1) would improve grocery access for lower income families.

¹⁷ [As vacant grocery property is sold, Dave’s Collinwood customers give feedback on shuttle service – The Land \(thelandcle.org\)](https://thelandcle.org/news/as-vacant-grocery-property-is-sold-dave-s-collinwood-customers-give-feedback-on-shuttle-service)

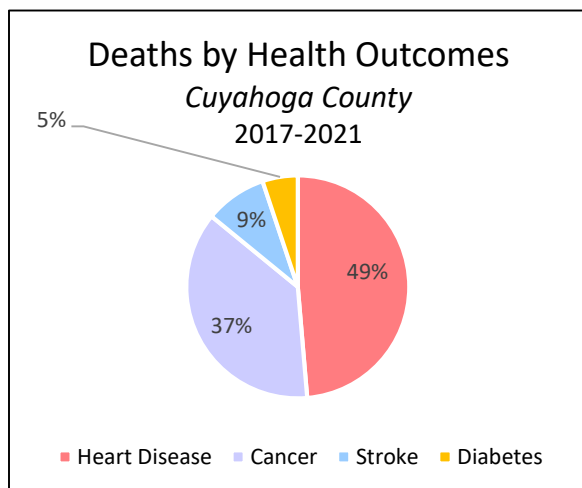
Figure 4. Distance to grocery store among lower income residents



Key takeaway: Access to healthy food options can be improved through more grocery locations in low-income neighborhoods AND/OR by increasing incomes for families.

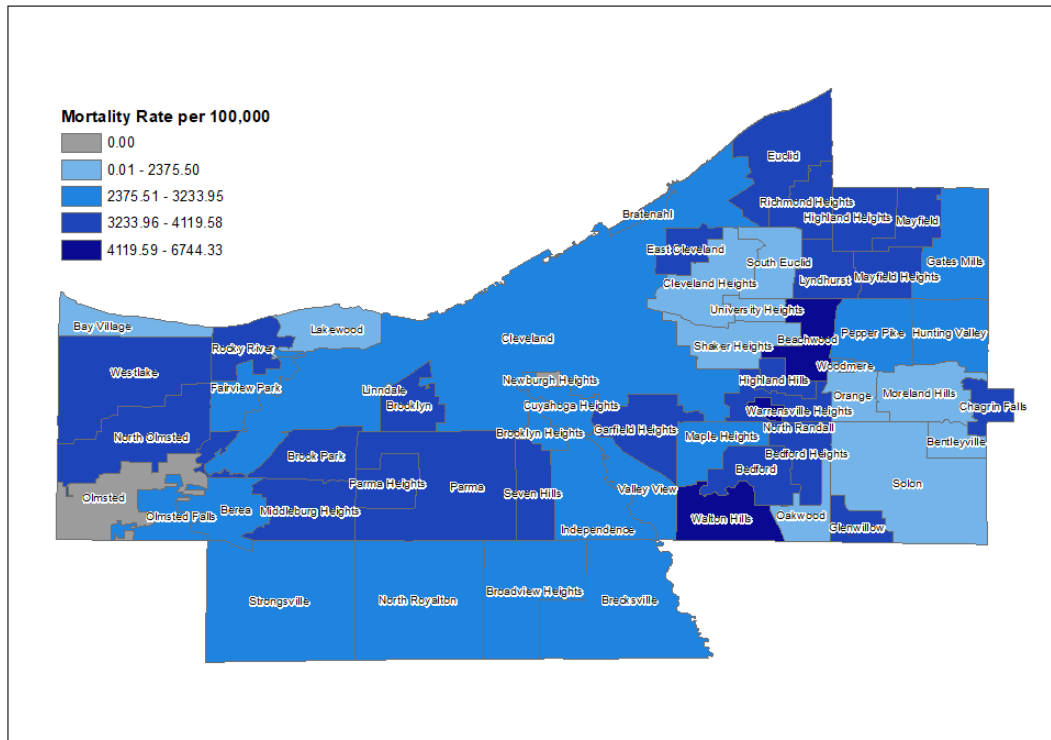
Figure 5 visualizes chronic disease death rate data from the Ohio Department of Health, covering the period 2017-2021 for heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes. About 49% of deaths from chronic diseases were related to heart disease.

Figure 5. Health outcomes in Cuyahoga County.



The map (Figure 6) displays Chronic Disease Death Rates for heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes combined, by municipality in Cuyahoga County, Ohio.

Figure 6. Chronic disease death rates in Cuyahoga County.



Studies have shown that populations with more severe food insecurity are more likely to have a chronic illness.¹⁸ Lack of food access can lead to increased risk for diet-related chronic diseases. Furthermore, lack of access to healthy food may increase the risk of death from chronic diseases such as heart disease.¹⁹ The analysis indicates association between low grocery store access areas and poor health outcomes. Many of the areas with low access to grocery stores have higher chronic disease mortality rates. The lack of access to enough nutritious food for an active, healthy life causes food insecurity which can lead to serious health issues.²⁰

Key takeaway: Food access/food insecurity is an important social determinant of health. There is an association between food insecurity and negative health outcomes.

¹⁸ [USDA: Food Insecurity, Chronic Disease, and Health Among Working-Age Adults](#)

¹⁹ [American Heart Association: Lack of access to healthy food may raise risk of death from heart failure](#)

²⁰ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/>

Strategy Discussion

- **Community participation** is critical to inform grocery store solutions. Examples in Cuyahoga County have demonstrated that residents are actively engaged in the conversation about their local grocery store. Residents can galvanize policy makers into action, set expectations with store owners and develop creative solutions. Residents in neighboring Dayton, OH organized a grocery co-op called Gem City Market to address grocery store gaps.²¹
- **Organized efforts** to implement and stabilize grocery stores in Cuyahoga County include Simon’s Supermarket in Euclid and in Buckeye, the Eastside Market and Dave’s Supermarket in Midtown, to name a few. A key takeaway from these efforts is: when public funding is provided to a private entity – how can we ensure that there is community benefit (accountability) AND on-going support to stabilize strategic grocery store locations?
- **Public health department** sanitarians have on-going inspection engagements at local grocery stores. Sanitarians informed the grocery store categorization process and provided insight on the impact of COVID-19 on store conditions. Sanitarians can “keep their finger on the pulse” and offer strategic insight regarding grocery store access and conditions.
- The City of Cleveland took legislative action in 2020 to **limit the expansion of dollar stores** within two miles of an existing location (Dollar Tree, Family Dollar, Dollar General and Five Below).²² Dollar Stores have drawn criticism for their rapid proliferation in low-income areas, lack of healthy food options, volume of resident complaints and OSHA violations.²³ Their expansion may limit the ability of grocery stores to stabilize and merits further and potential policy solutions.
- **The County Plastic Bag Ban** went into effect as of January 2022. Cuyahoga County is committed to helping stores transition away from single-use plastic bags at the checkout.²⁴ Discarded plastic bags pollute our waterways and our communities, waste limited resources, leach toxins into our water and soil, and contribute to the climate crisis.
 - The “Sustainable Store Grant” is relevant to grocers and other retailers. The grant (up to \$5,000/store with a focus in low-income areas) is available to support retailers’ efforts to eliminate plastic checkout bags. (Note: National chains are not eligible.) For more information, contact the Department of Consumer Affairs at 216-443-7035.

²¹ [Gem City Market — CO-OP Dayton \(coopdayton.org\)](https://coopdayton.org/)

²² [New Limitations on Small Box Retail Store Locations | Cleveland City Council](#)

²³ [As Dollar Stores Proliferate, Some Communities Push Back | Civil Eats](#)

²⁴ [Cuyahoga County Bring Your Own Bags \(BYOBag\)](#)

CONTRIBUTIONS

AUTHORS

Roger Sikes, MPH – Cuyahoga County Board of Health

B.J. Fletcher, Ph.D. – Cleveland State University

CONTRIBUTORS

Annie Bartosh, MPH, REHS – Cuyahoga County Board of Health

Patrick Cusick, REHS, MSPH – Cleveland Department of Public Health

Keymah Durden – RidAll Green Partnership

Deborah Gray – Cleveland City Council Ward 4

Trevelle Harp – Northeast Ohio Alliance for Hope (NOAH)

Julian Kahn – Buckeye Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL)

Kevin Leeson – Cuyahoga County Planning Commission

Dr. David Margolius – Cleveland Department of Public Health

Daniel Meaney, GISP – Cuyahoga County Planning Commission

Vino Panakkal, MPH – Cuyahoga County Board of Health

Nichelle Shaw, MPH – Cuyahoga County Board of Health

Katharyne Starinsky – Cuyahoga County Department of Consumer Affairs

Jonathan Welle – Cleveland Owns

Tiffany Wong, MMS – Cuyahoga County Board of Health

A special thanks to the Ohio Department of Health's Creating Healthy Communities program for providing funding for this report and to the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission for their focus and consistency.