

The power of policy: How incentives and penalties can change the food environment

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The PRC's seminar series recently featured Marice Ashe, executive director of California-based Public Health Law and Policy (PHLP). PHLP supports government and advocacy-based organizations in reaching their public health goals by helping them build their capacity to fight for policy change. PHLP also does research and analysis on policy questions, and translates their findings into practical tools like fact sheets and toolkits.

The Power of Policy outlined strategies that city governments may use to support healthy food environments. Ashe refers to policies which support healthy urban environments as "carrots". These policies provide incentives for development agencies to build accessible and attractive urban areas, support economic development of food retail outlets, provide access to affordable housing, and construct properties which support a variety of uses. Such policies encourage developers to become "public health actors", allowing them to leverage their power towards positive public health outcomes. In contrast, "sticks" are policies that specify minimum health-related standards and penalize those who break the rules, for example through inspection programs, fines, and contracts.

For more information on PHLP, go to www.phlpnet.org.