|  |
| --- |
| **Engaging local communities in monitoring food environments: Opportunities for advocacy and action to promote health** |
| Setting/ Problem**:** Increasingly, new evidence reveals how food environments shape the availability, affordability, and social acceptability of food and nutrition choices, and demonstrating associations between food environments and diet-related outcomes. We engaged local communities in monitoring their own food environments to inform local action on policy and practical change to create health promoting food environments for children and youth.  Intervention: In partnership with health system representatives, such as local health promotion facilitators, we work with predominantly rural communities that have identified healthy eating as a priority for action. Following an orientation to the project, communities identify settings (e.g. schools, cafeterias, childcare centres, recreation centres, etc.) where children gather and using an online platform or “app”, gather data using smart phones or tablets regarding food availability, nutrition policies, programs and resources related to healthy eating. The research team consults with community members via teleconference to validate data for comprehensiveness, and then applies objective grading criteria to develop a local Nutrition Report Card on Food Environments for Children and youth. The finished product comprised of a written report and a community info-graphic is presented back to the community, identifying how their community environment is supportive of healthy eating as well as areas to improve upon. The research team and the community meet to co-create context-specific recommendations for change to present to local decision-makers.  Outcomes:Communities have enthusiastically participated in collecting local data, and have expressed a new appreciation of the role of food environments in shaping food and nutrition choices. While the idea of policy change initially seemed abstract and high level, community members recognized the potential power of working locally. For example, the Report Cards were used to influence local businesses to stock healthier food products and to display them more prominently, to catalyze local schools into adopting and implementing voluntary nutrition guidelines as policy, and to involve community health practitioners as resources in mobilizing local change.  Implications: Engaging local communities in monitoring food environments can help to  mobilize environmental change to support local citizens in promoting the health of children and youth**.**  Preferred presentation format: Oral |