



Greater Chicago Food Depository Strategy Brief: Promoting Patient Food Security through Community Health Care Partnerships

THE CHALLENGE

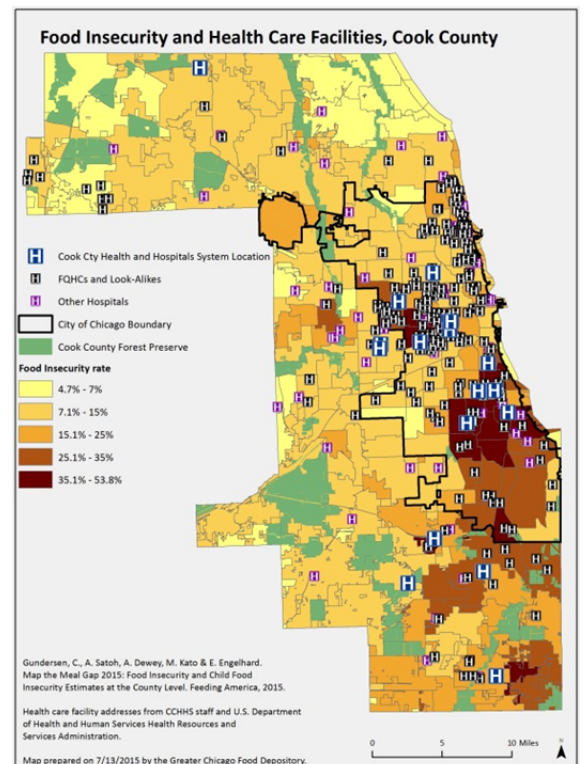
Food insecurity is associated with a host of adverse and costly health outcomes for all age ranges. Specifically, individuals faced with food insecurity often have the double burden of managing diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, depression as well as learning and behavioral problems in children. The challenges of managing these and a host of other chronic illnesses result in frequent hospital visits and increased health care costs.

The Food Depository participated in extensive research in 2012-2013 in conjunction with Feeding America for the quadrennial *Hunger in America* study, which captures detailed information about who is in need of emergency food assistance in Cook County and the circumstances those individuals face. Locally, the data was collected by the Food Depository, member agencies, clients and volunteers at sites across Cook County. Below are key findings from the study, *Hunger in America 2014*:

- Annually 46 Million people in the US – 1 in 7 – receive emergency food assistance through Feeding America’s network of 200 food banks.
 - A significant number of clients in America report significant health challenges including 58% of the households have members with high blood pressure and 33% of households report having a member with diabetes
 - Reporting themselves in fair or poor health, 79% acknowledging they purchased the most inexpensive food available, even if they knew it wasn’t the healthiest option, in the effort to provide enough food for their household
- Food Depository clients are no exception: 35% of households have a member with diabetes, 60% with high blood pressure and 62% of the clients been faced with the choice of paying for food or medical bills

THE OPPORTUNITY

With over 812,000 unique clients visiting the Food Depository network and a Cook County food insecurity rate of 14.6% for the general population and 20.9% for children, we have an opportunity to build a bridge for clients between preventative health care, nutrition education and quality food. Preventing or mitigating diet-related diseases where possible is essential to helping food insecure people achieve stability and self-sufficiency.



THE RESPONSE

In collaboration with our health care partners, we can develop a customized, health partner strategy, which we believe empowers patients with the knowledge and access to resources needed to live a healthy lifestyle. The approach can include:

1. Health care providers utilizing the food insecurity screening tool

2-Item Food Insecurity Screen¹

Within the past 12 months, I/we worried whether our food would run out before I/we got money to buy more.

- Often true.
- Sometimes true.
- Never true.

Within the past 12 months, the food I/we bought just didn't last and I/we didn't have money to get more.

- Often true.
- Sometimes true.
- Never true.

**Responses of often true or sometime true to either question indicates risk of food insecurity.*

¹ Hager, Erin, PhD, et al. Development and Validity of a 2-Item Screen to Identify Families at Risk for Food Insecurity. *Pediatrics*, Volume 126, No. 1, July 2010. www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2009-3146.

2. Health care providers connect food insecure patients to existing nutritious food resources such as SNAP benefits and emergency food access locations
3. Provide food insecurity training to healthcare professionals to empower discussions about food access

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

After a successful pilot in the fall of 2013, we officially launched this work in August 2015 with Access Community Health and Cook County Health and Hospital System (CCHHS).

Since the time of the launch, ACCESS and CCHHS accomplishments include:

- Embedding the food insecurity screening into their electronic patient management systems and screening patients system wide for food insecurity
- A total of 16 Health Centers have implemented all of the following strategies:
 - Utilizing food insecurity screening during patient visits
 - Providing after visit referrals to SNAP benefit assistance and information on emergency food access locations for patients screened as food insecure
 - Hosting fresh produce distributions at their sites
- From August 2015 through August 2017, the 16 Health Centers have hosted a total of 127 fresh produce distributions, providing 386,506 pounds of fresh produce to 14,605 households that support 53,142 individuals.

