

Riverside University Health System “Food is Medicine” Program

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Food Insecurity in the Inland Empire

- **The People**
 - **Moazzum Bajwa** - Family Medicine Physician
Riverside University Health System (RUHS)
(a federally qualified health center or FQHC)
 - **Valerie Comeaux** - Program Coordinator
Riverside University Health System –
Public Health, CalFresh Healthy Living
- **The Issue**
 - **Food insecurity:** 38% of patients reported food insecurity in the last 12 months
 - **Intervention:** Increase access to food resources among low-income patients with food insecurity



RUHS Moreno Valley Community Health Center

Overview

- Identify patients experiencing food insecurity and provide access to healthy food, at no cost
- Screening: [“Hunger Vital Signs”](#)
- Referral:
 - **Community Resources** – provided by Feeding America and CalFresh Healthy Living
 - **Food Boxes** – on-site clinic distribution



Partnerships

- **Riverside University Health System – Public Health**
 - CalFresh Healthy Living
- **Key Stakeholders:**
 - 2021: patient community, clinic staff, volunteers
 - 2023: community garden, public health organizations
- **Existing Network:**
 - Anthem Foundation
 - Feeding America Riverside / San Bernardino
 - Riverside University Health System
 - RUHS/UC Riverside Family Medicine Residency
 - UCSF Champion Provider Fellowship

Moreno Valley Community Health Center
(MVCHC Team)



Timeline

- Jan 2021 – Mar 2021 – Food insecurity screening pilot at RUHS MVCHC
- April 2021 – Oct 2021 Logistics coordination: food delivery/storage, clinic workflow
- August 2021 – Recruited interns and volunteers to contact patients
- November 2021– Program launch



Feeding America delivery, early 2022

Successes and Opportunities

- **1,450** food boxes distributed to patients/families in our community
- Identified local **warehouse storage space** to meet increased demand for food boxes
- “**Family Resource Centers**” within network of community health centers



RUHS – Public Health warehouse 2022

Challenges

- **End of federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (May 2023)**
 - Loss of Pandemic-EBT benefits for children, decrease in CalFresh dollars for elderly adults
- **Limited long-term funding options**
 - Initial request for funding denied (Medi-Cal managed care partner)
 - Door Dash partnership cancelled (HERO – Homebound Emergency Relief Outreach)
- **Low attendance at virtual nutrition education classes**

Next Steps

- **“Food is Medicine”**
 - Emergency food supplies → [Medically-Tailored Meals](#) (MTMs)
 - Fresh produce, in addition to shelf-stable goods
- **Sustainability** of program/intervention
 - Transition from paper screening to electronic medical records (EMR)
 - Dedicated staff person to coordinate storage, timing, maintenance, tracking
- Opportunities for **sharing/collaboration**
 - Conferences and publications for community-based partners
 - Support of policy and legislative efforts to improve coverage for medically supportive food and nutrition interventions (i.e. Medi-Cal / CalFresh benefits)

Thank You

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