

# FORMING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF AT-RISK COMMUNITIES

## HEALTHCARE PROVIDER SUCCESS STORY



After decades of big city living, Dr. Vivi Stafford was ready for rural life and a new position with Avenal Community Health Center in Kings County. She discovered underserved communities and residents who needed help. Ironically, although agriculture is the most important industry in the county, many residents live in food deserts and food insecurity is rampant. Unsurprisingly, anxiety about not having enough food each month causes many residents to binge when food is available. Nearly 80 percent of residents are overweight or obese.<sup>†</sup>

While delving into the reasons why so many patients felt food insecure, Dr. Stafford learned many of them believed they couldn't take their groceries on the bus because the Kings County Area Public Transit Agency (KCAPTA) had a limit on the number of grocery bags passengers could bring on.

"Coming from a big city, I had no idea that transportation was such an issue," Dr. Stafford says. Without the Champion Provider Fellowship's training and technical assistance she says may not have reached out to Angie Dow, executive director of KCAPTA, to raise her patients' concerns.

"I appreciate brainstorming with her," says Dow. "Our clients are her patients. My passion is to provide transportation for the most at-risk clients. Her passion is to help patients access healthy food. Working together we can solve problems."

<sup>†</sup> "Healthy Eating." Kings Partnership for Prevention. (2018) <http://www.kpfp.org/index.php?module=Tiles&controller=index&action=display&alias=HealthyEating>; Accessed on September 25, 2018.



**"As a Champion Provider Fellow, I believe doctors have a role to play outside of their clinics. Sometimes simply asking the right questions can lead to major community change."**

*Dr. Vivi Stafford, Kings County, Primary Care Physician*

Dr. Stafford's reaching out to KCAPTA has led to innovative solutions. Many of the buses have now been modified to allow passengers to bring on collapsible shopping carts and KCAPTA is pilot-testing a micro-transit program that they plan to roll out next summer. Dow says that while it doesn't make financial sense to open new routes that will only have ridership during limited times of the day, on-demand micro-transit enables passengers to request a van when they need a ride to a grocery store or food bank. The van then links riders to a regularly scheduled bus line so they can get home again.

Dr. Stafford also developed maps that indicate where all of the food banks and emergency pantries are located for both Dow and local health clinics since not all are convenient to public transportation. As a result, KCAPTA plans to build a new central transportation hub within the next two years that will have a farmers' market or food bank nearby.

*The Champion Provider Fellowship empowers, trains and supports doctors and dentists to use their expertise and respected voices to improve the health of communities through local policy, systems and environmental changes.*

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