

# Riverside University Health System “Food is Medicine” Program

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Riverside County



# 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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