

Addressing Food Insecurity in Our Communities

Improving Food Insecurity Screening in the Emergency Department

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Main Line Health



Background

In 2019, more than 1.35 million Pennsylvanians had barriers to accessing food. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these numbers grew to 1.77 million. Prior to institutionalizing our food insecurity goals, screening patients for social needs was occurring, but at a low rate. ED staff screened approximately 43% of emergency department patients for food insecurity prior to January 2022. Even from these early numbers, the organization approximated that by improving screening rates, most campus EDs would encounter approximately 1-2 food insecure patients per day, plus one campus with as much as five (5) food insecure patients per day. The emergency departments made it a goal to improve screening rates to 85% of all ED patients, acknowledging that it may not be appropriate to screen every patient, depending on their emergency situation.

Goals

Leveraging the reach of the Emergency Departments, MLH aimed to systematically identify and address food insecurity needs in our communities by:

1. Improving systematic screening of patients for risk of food insecurity using a validated tool (the 2-question Hunger Vital Signs).
2. Offering resources to address immediate and longer-term food insecurity needs.

Methods

The following interventions helped achieve improvement:

1. Scripting was developed to help make nursing staff more comfortable having conversations regarding food insecurity risks with patients.
2. The screening questions were made required documentation in the EMR for the ED encounter. While required documentation did not make the screening questions a “hard stop,” it did create a visual cue to the nursing staff to help them remember to ask the screening questions. It also streamlined the EPIC workflow to document the screening question responses in EPIC reducing a workflow that used to take several clicks to navigate the EMR pages, to a single click.



3. Food insecurity resources were made available to ED staff so they could provide patients with support if they screened at-risk for food insecurity. These resources were two options. The emergency departments were stocked with shelf stable food bags to address patients' immediate food access needs. The EMR was also loaded with food insecurity resources, like local food pantries, that staff can add to the patients discharge paperwork.

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND OUTREACH

GOVERNMENT RESOURCES
Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
The United Way

ONLINE GROCERY DELIVERY (Self-Pay)
• instacart.com
• freshdirect.com
• amazon.com
• amazonfresh.com

IN-STORE NUTRITION CONSULTATIONS
Wellness Walks @ GIANT Food Stores
Take a walk through the store with a nutritionist to learn quick tips for making better choices. Virtual events are also offered. All for free!
For more information or to find your nearest store location and register, call 1.800.758.0254

HOSPITAL DISCHARGE MEAL KIT
Main Line Health can offer you two meals after your discharge to home.
Please review the important information below:
• All food items in this meal kit are shelf stable and do not require cooking or refrigeration.
• Allergy warning: The meal kit may contain common allergens such as wheat, soy, gluten, or milk. Please review each item for product contents if food allergies are a concern.

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND OUTREACH

Community food resources

FIND FOOD IN ANY AREA
Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger
215.430.0555 | hungercoalition.org
• Offers help finding food pantry locations in the Southeastern Pennsylvania region and application assistance for Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP)
Jewish Relief Agency (JRA)
610-660-0100 | jewishrelief.org
• Monthly Home-delivery
• Kosher pantry staples and fresh produce, kid-friendly food items, diapers, toiletries, kids clothing, household items
• Income and zip code requirements (serves Bucks, Montgomery, Delaware and Philadelphia counties)

WHYHUNGER HOTLINE
1.800.5 HUNGRY (1.800.548.6479)
whyhunger.org/find-food
• National hotline that refers people in need across the U.S. to food pantries, soup kitchens, summer meals sites, government nutrition programs and other helpful resources
• Call or text your zip code to 1.800.548.6479 to locate a local emergency food provider and other support services
• Llama a la Linea Contra el Hambre
1.800.5 HUNGRY (1.800.548.6479). Envíale tu Código Postal en mensaje de Texto al 1.800.548.6479

PHILADELPHIA COUNTY
ACHIEVEability
215.748.8800 | achieveability.org
Provides support in the areas of housing, personal development, parenting, education and finance to the Philadelphia community.
Caring for Friends
215.464.2224 | caringforfriends.org
Provides food and friendship to seniors, kids and adults in the five-county Philadelphia region.
People's Emergency Center
267.773.5880 | pec-care.org
Provides housing and family support.

SENIOR SERVICES
Chester County Aging Services
610.344.5536
Delaware County Office of Services for the Aging (COASA)
610.490.4300
Montgomery County Office of Senior Services
610.278.3621
Pennsylvania Department of Aging
aging.pa.gov/aging-services/meals
• Meals at Senior Community Centers
• At-home meal delivery
• Senior food box program: agriculture.pa.gov/seniorfoodbox
Philadelphia Corporation on Aging HelpLine
215.765.9040
Share Food Program
215.223.2220 | sharefoodprogram.org
Senior Food Box Program (SFBP)—monthly food boxes for eligible seniors. Home delivery available.

CHESTER COUNTY
Chester County Food Bank
610.876.6000 | chestercountyfoodbank.org
Available for all in need of food services through referrals.

DELAWARE COUNTY
DIFAN: Delaware County Interfaith Food Assistance Network
610.368.7540
• Network of food pantries throughout Delaware County coordinated by Family & Community Service of Delaware County.
• Each family receives three meals a day, five days a week, monthly for each family member.

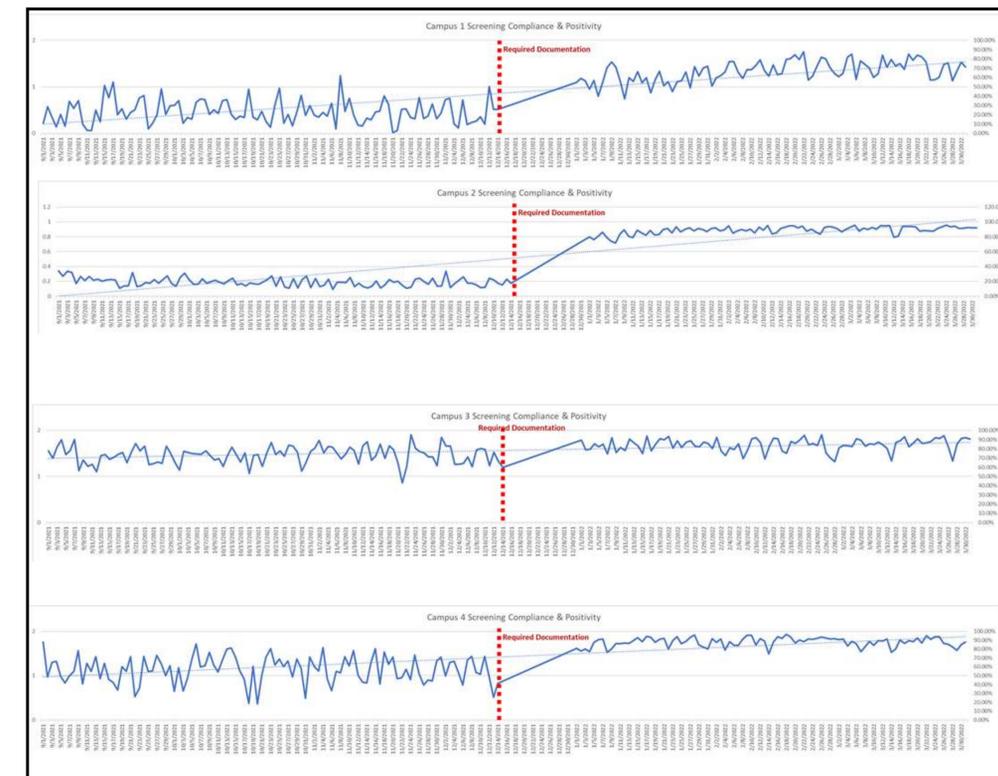
MONTGOMERY COUNTY
Ardmore Food Pantry
610.649.1486
stmarysardmore.org/ardmore-food-pantry
Open to all on Mondays 11:00 am-12:00 pm and 6:00-7:00 pm.
Daily Bread Community Food Pantry
610.489.5540 | dailybreadcommunityfoodpantry.org
• Available for Montgomery County residents with current ID and document with current address.
• Open on Wednesdays and Saturdays 9:00-11:00 am, Thursdays 6:00-8:00 pm.
• Other services provided such as free haircuts, nutrition education and school supply drives.
Memorial Church of God in Christ
215.618.5504 | memorialsoc.org/food-pantry
Open to all on Wednesdays 12:00-5:00 pm, Thursdays 12:00-4:00 pm, and Fridays 12:00-6:00 pm. Visit the food pantry Facebook page for more updates on pantry's hours.

This is not a comprehensive food resource list nor does Main Line Health endorse any of the resources provided.

Outcomes

Screening rates across the health system were improved from 43% to approximately 85%. Figure 1 includes run charts that show the daily screening rates for each campus both before and after the implementation of required documentation, denoted by the red dotted line. Visually, it appears that every campus experienced a notable increase. Hypothesis testing also confirmed that the increases were statistically significant. Appendix E shows that the increases were statistically significant. Four months post implementation, 530 patients were identified as at-risk for food insecurity (simple annualization equals 1,612 patients this year).

Figure 1: Run Charts of Daily Screening Rates for 4 MLH hospitals



Lessons Learned

- Our process can apply to any program that aims to address any social determinants of health, not just food insecurity.
- Obtain senior leadership buy in, up front
- Assemble an interdisciplinary team that includes all of the stakeholders in the process.
- Subordinate new processes to uncontrollable constraints (embed new tasks into existing nursing workflow)
- Leverage process improvement tools and resources (DMADV/DMAIC, A3, Gemba walks, process maps, data driven control plan)
- Ensure warm handoff to localized process owners

4. A Best Practice Advisory (BPA) was implemented. Once a patient screens at-risk for food insecurity, a reminder pop-up-window will continuously nudge the nurse to offer a food insecurity resource (food bag and/or community organization) to the patient.
5. A team of social care providers (social work, Community Health Worker, and others) conduct post-discharge telephone outreach to patients to follow up on whether resources offered during their visit were helpful and assess for additional SDOH needs.