



Assessing Readiness and Creating Value Through Food Bank-Health Care Partnerships

Getting Started – Understanding Health Care Partners

Across the country, food banks are working to understand opportunities to address food insecurity in partnership with local health care organizations, including hospitals, Federally Qualified Health Centers, physician practices, and others. Food banks at the forefront of this work have sought to understand how to best support health care organizations as “customers” of food banks, creating community interventions that best meet the needs for different health care settings. This work illuminated the spectrum of readiness of potential health care partners to address food insecurity.

For hospitals, clinics, and other health care organizations, organizational readiness to engage in partnership activities varies based on community needs; the partners’ understanding of the connection between food insecurity & health; and the organizational capacity to create and implement screening activities, programs and interventions, to name a few.

For health care organizations who are considering ways to address social determinants of health, interventions focused on food insecurity may not always be the highest priority. In some communities, addressing social issues such as housing may be deemed a more urgent need to support the health of patients.

With that in mind, it is important for food banks to consider the varying starting points of potential health care partners, in order to create solutions that address a real need for them rather than approaching partnerships with food bank-centric solutions in mind. Four common levels of readiness of health care partners were identified and are as follows.

Levels of Readiness of Potential Health Care Partners to Engage in Activities to Address Food Insecurity

- **Level I:** Health care organization wants to address social determinants of health, but hasn’t done so because they lack information about why food insecurity should be a priority and how to approach the issue
- **Level II:** Health care organization wants to address food insecurity but this isn’t the highest organizational priority based on staff time, space, other resource constraints, or community needs
- **Level III:** Health care organization wants to more effectively reach individuals and families in the community with health education messages and/or health education programming
- **Level IV:** Health care organization wants to implement an intervention to more effectively & immediately address the needs of their patients who have been identified as food insecure

Creating Value for Health Care Organizations through Partnerships

Despite the varying goals and activities of food bank-health care partnerships, health care organizations are generally looking for common elements, including:

- Proof that food bank partnership activities are effective and will demonstrate a return on their investment of staff time, financial resources, space
- Turnkey solutions that are easy to implement and don't seem risky to implement

What follows is a series of recommendations for food bank – health care partnership activities based on the starting point of the health care organization, using a Value Proposition Framework that answers the following questions.

For: *(target customer segment)*

Who want or need: *(biggest concerns/unmet needs)*

Feeding America/food banks provide: *(what are we offering?)*

That allows: *(what's the benefit to customer? what problem does it solve for them?)* **Uniquely:** *(what makes this a unique proposition compared to alternatives)*

For more about this Value Proposition Framework, visit the [Strategyzer Value Proposition Canvas](#).

Partnership with Health Care Organization, Level I

For a health care partner **who wants** to address social determinants of health, but haven't done so because they lack information about why this should be a priority and how to approach the issue,

Food banks can provide education for the health care provider staff about the link between food insecurity and health, as well as offering patient-facing education materials and referral resources.

That allows the health care provider and their staff to begin having conversations with patients about food insecurity and have the resources and confidence to make referrals to community resources in order to begin addressing that problem.

Uniquely, the food bank and their network of agency partners understand food insecurity and the needs of individuals/families living in food insecure households in the local community better than any other organization.

Turnkey Solutions: For food banks creating partnerships with organizations at this level, consider turnkey solutions that focus on provider education and patient resources, including:

Training & Education for health care staff

- Humana & Feeding America: [Food Insecurity and Health: A Tool Kit for Physicians and Health Care Organizations](#)
- American Academy of Pediatrics and Food Research & Action Center: [Addressing Food Insecurity and Health: A Toolkit for Pediatricians](#)
- American Hospital Association [Food Insecurity and the Role of Hospitals](#)
- CDC Nutrition & Obesity Prevention Research & Education Network's Hunger Safety Net [Food Insecurity Screening Algorithms for Adults, Pediatrics, and Patients Living with Diabetes](#)

Videos:

- Feeding America: [Illuminating Intersections: Hunger & Health](#)
- Kaiser Permanente [Hunger Screening in Colorado](#)

Partnership with Health Care Organization, Level II

For a health care provider **who wants** to address food insecurity but where this isn't the highest priority based on staff time, space, other resource constraints, or community need,

Food banks can provide referrals to agency partners, SNAP application assistance, and other relevant food bank education or food distribution and community programs.

That allows health care providers and their staff to link patients with existing resources that support access to healthy food and potentially improve health status.

Uniquely, the food bank and their network of agency partners exist to provide these resources for food insecure individuals and families. Food banks understand food insecurity and the needs of individuals/families living in food insecure households in the local community better than any other organization.

Turnkey Solutions: For these partnerships, consider turnkey solutions that focus on identification of food insecure individuals and connecting patient to existing resources, including:

- [Feeding America's Template Health care provider training & education about link between food insecurity and other priority issues](#)
- [Food insecurity screening using Hunger Vital Sign™ for food insecurity screening](#)
- Information on using food bank referral line or other reliable referral options
- Implementation of targeted food voucher/referral programs
- SNAP outreach and enrollment information or on-site enrollment support

Considerations:

- Follow-up and data sharing strategies to understand the efficacy of referrals
- Capacity of food bank programs and partner agencies for increased demand

Partnership with Health Care Organization, Level III

For a health care provider **who wants** to more effectively reach individuals and families in the community with health education messages and/or health education programming

Food Banks can provide connections to clients through joint programming offered at agencies or food bank run distributions.

That allows health care providers to make community connections to *insert local priority* families/individuals to achieve public health education and marketing goals.

Uniquely, the food bank and their network of agency partners has a trusted relationship with clients and can make connections with those clients for other resources that may be relevant and helpful for their health

Turnkey Solutions: If you are here, solutions should focus on the health screening, education, and access needs and opportunities of the local partners, such as:

- Health Screening done by health care providers or students
- Health Education Programming done by health care providers or students
- Health Insurance Enrollment
- Vaccines

Considerations:

- Capacity of distribution sites for other activities
- Sustainability (staff, resources)
- Efficacy

Partnership with Health Care Organization, Level IV

For a health care provider **who wants** an intervention to more effectively & immediately address the needs of their patients who have been identified as food insecure ,

Food banks can provide access to healthy food through new distribution points at clinic and hospital food pantries, food pharmacies, and/or mobile food distributions at health care facilities.

That allows patients to access healthy food to support food security and health status. *Ultimately (once data available) improving blood sugar control, reducing patient 30-day readmissions, increasing patient satisfaction, reducing patient missed appointments, reducing unnecessary ER visits, etc.*

Uniquely, this leverages the food bank's a) expertise in food distribution, b) access to nutritious food donations and nutritious food purchasing power and c) ability to tailor food distribution activities to the specific needs of clients/customers.

Turnkey Solutions: For partnerships with organizations at this level, consider these approaches:

- Referrals to local agencies/food bank programs with follow-up and data sharing strategies
- On-site distribution of food through models that are easily adaptable to the workflow of the health care provider
- On-site food pantry
- Mobile distribution
- Frozen meals for distribution upon discharge
- Onsite meal programs (SFSP, congregate meals)

Considerations:

- Food Bank & Agency Capacity
- \$ and Staff Resources, Sustainability
- Evaluation:
- Efficacy of the referrals
- Efficacy of the intervention
- Data sharing strategies
- Processes that assure compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act

(HIPAA). For more information about HIPAA, visit [Food Banks as Partners in Health Promotion: How HIPAA and Concerns About Patient Privacy Affect Your Partnership](#)