

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 support health care organizations as customers of food banks, co-creating interventions that best meet patient needs within different health care settings. This work has illuminated the spectrum of readiness of potential health care partners to address food insecurity.

The organizational readiness of hospitals, clinics, and other health care agencies to engage in partnership activities varies based on community needs, the partners' understanding of the connection between food insecurity and health, and the organizational capacity to co-develop and implement programming.

For health care organizations who are considering ways to address social determinants of health, interventions focused on food insecurity may not always be their highest priority. In some communities, addressing social needs like transportation or housing may be deemed more urgent to support the health of patients.

Thus, it is important for food banks to consider the varying starting points of health care partners to develop solutions that address a priority need rather than approaching partnerships with food bank-centric solutions in mind. In general, four common levels of readiness of health care partners have been identified.

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 or 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 health education programming.

Level IV: Health care organization wants to implement an intervention to more effectively and 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:

- Evidence that food bank partnership activities are effective and will likely demonstrate a return on their investment of staff time, financial resources, and space.
- Turnkey solutions that are considered low-risk and relatively easy to implement.

The following is a series of recommendations for food bank – health care partnership activities based on the starting point of the health care organization and using a **Value Proposition Framework**¹ that answers the following questions:

- For:** *(target customer or partner segment)*
- Who want or need:** *(biggest concerns or unmet needs)*
- Feeding America / food banks provide:** *(what are we offering?)*
- That allows:** *(what's the benefit to the customer / partner? What problem does it help solve for them?)*
- Uniquely:** *(what makes this a unique proposition compared to other alternatives?)*

Partnership with Health Care Organization: Level I

For a health care partner **who wants** to address social determinants of health, but hasn'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 and training for health care partner staff about the links between food insecurity and health, as well as patient-facing materials and referral resources.

That allows the health care provider and their staff to initiate conversations with patients about food insecurity, increase provider access to information, build provider confidence, and begin developing a process to refer patients to community resources in order to address the problem of food insecurity.

Uniquely, the food bank and their network of agency partners understand food insecurity and the needs of neighbors and families living in food-insecure households in the 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 and education for health care staff:

- Humana & Feeding America: [Food Insecurity Screening Toolkit](#)
- American Academy of Pediatrics and Food Research & Action Center: [Screen and Intervene: A Toolkit for Pediatricians to Address Food Insecurity](#)
- American Hospital Association: [Food Insecurity and the Role of Hospitals](#)
- Nutrition and Obesity Policy Research and Education Network (NOPREN): [Food Insecurity Screening Algorithms](#) for Adults, Pediatrics, and Adult 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 partner **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 referrals to other food bank programming, education, or community-based nutrition and food access programs.

¹ For more about this Value Proposition Framework, visit the [Strategyzer Value Proposition Canvas](#).

That allows health care providers and their staff to link patients to existing resources that support access to nutritious foods that can support health promotion and care goals.

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

Turnkey Solutions:

For these partnerships, consider turnkey solutions that focus on identification of patients experiencing food insecurity and connecting patients to existing resources, including:

- [Trainings](#), including the [Health Care Provider Training: Screening for and Addressing Food Insecurity](#)
- Food insecurity screening using [Hunger Vital Sign™](#)
- Information on using food bank referral lines or other reliable referral options
- Implementation of targeted food voucher and referral programs
- [SNAP Application Assistance](#), outreach, and enrollment information and 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 partner **who wants** to more effectively reach individuals and families in the community with health education messages and health education programming,

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

That allows health care providers to make community connections to *(insert local priority)* for neighbors and families to achieve public health education and marketing goals.

Uniquely, the food bank and their network of agency partners have a trusted relationship with neighbors and can make connections with those clients to 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 local partners, such as:

- Health screenings done by health care providers or students
- Health education programming done by health care providers or students
- Health insurance enrollment
- Vaccine campaigns led by health care and public health partners

Considerations:

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

Partnership with Health Care Organization: Level IV

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

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

That allows patients to access nutritious—and even medically-tailored—food with the goals to ultimately improve food security, dietary intake, and other outcomes ([Healthy Days](#), patient satisfaction, and possibly clinical and care outcomes like improved blood glucose and blood pressure control, or reduced hospital readmissions²).

Uniquely, this leverages the food bank’s expertise in food distribution, access to nutritious food through donations and purchasing power, and ability to tailor food distribution activities to the specific needs of neighbors, patients, and families.

Turnkey Solutions:

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

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

Considerations:

- Food bank and agency capacity
- Funding, staff resources, and 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, access: [How HIPAA and Concerns about Protecting Patient Information Affect Your Food Bank – Health Care Partnership](#)

For technical assistance, additional program models and resources, access the [Health Care Partnerships Toolkit HungerNet site](#) (for network members), or contact the Feeding America Health and Nutrition Team at: nutritionteam@feedingamerica.org.

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² Evidence on the impact of food bank – health care partnerships and interventions on clinical outcomes is evolving. Access [this evidence review](#) for more information and additional considerations.