

NCCDPHP Success Story

Boston Health Center Prescribes Better Nutrition Through Food Truck



At A Glance

Boston REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health): Partners in Health and Housing (PHH) improved access to healthy, affordable foods for 5,120 public housing residents by arranging more frequent visits from a mobile grocery. From January through September 2016, Boston REACH: PHH worked with South End Community Health Center (SECHC) and Fresh Truck to increase the number of visits by the grocery-on-wheels. As a result, the number of healthy Fresh Truck food purchases at SECHC increased nearly 500%.

By Aileen Shen

Public Health Challenge

Poverty, food security, and obesity are related. A higher percentage of Boston Housing Authority (BHA) adult residents (34%) and assisted renter (AR) residents (35%) have obesity compared with homeowners (21%), according to the Health of Boston 2016-2017 report. Higher percentages of BHA residents also report high blood pressure and diabetes compared to homeowners. A higher percentage of BHA and AR residents report low fruit and vegetable consumption compared to homeowners. Fruit and vegetable consumption is key to overall healthy eating, which can reduce the risk of overweight and obesity. According to the Boston Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, for 2010, 2013 and 2015 combined, 25% of BHA residents and 32% of AR residents reported at least sometimes being hungry but not eating because they could not afford enough food—compared with 3% of homeowners.

Approach

Better access to healthy, affordable food is an important tool in obesity prevention and improving the overall health of communities. Boston REACH worked with SECHC and a nonprofit food vendor, Fresh Truck, to provide better access to healthy, affordable food for 5,120 public housing residents who live nearby. Fresh Truck is a renovated school bus that carries a wide selection of fresh, healthy, and affordable food to underserved areas to help people improve their diet and health. With Boston REACH's support, SECHC increased the frequency of "Fresh Truck" visits from once a month to twice a week and extended each visit from 2 hours to 3 to 4 hours.

"It's very important for us to work with our patients to not only address medical issues but also social determinants of health. Fresh Truck is a key component to help our patients have access to healthy foods."

- Karen van Unen

Results

With increased access to Fresh Truck at SECHC, sales at the site increased from an average of \$66 a month to \$390 a month (491%). From January through September 2016, 2,861 customers visited the Fresh Truck site. Clinicians and staff at SECHC also provided patients with \$5 coupons for Fresh Truck to encourage visits. Fresh Truck accepts cash, credit, and Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards. The SECHC site quickly became the most popular Fresh Truck site in Boston.

What's Next

Boston REACH will continue to grow its model for healthy, affordable food access by bringing the Fresh Truck to three more health centers in Boston. Together, the four health centers will work to initiate food insecurity screenings and referrals in clinical settings. By identifying patients who are hungry or at risk for hunger and connecting them to healthy, affordable food resources – including those at health centers – Boston REACH seeks to reduce food insecurity in these neighborhoods. Additionally, the initiative will continue to connect with the Boston Housing Authority on developments neighboring the health centers to reach residents in need.

Find Out More

Providing access to healthy food in community settings requires broad support and partnerships, including those between nonprofit and community-based organizations, public housing developments, local government, and community members. For more information about Boston REACH: Partners in Health and Housing the Fresh Truck efforts, visit: www.bphc.org/reachphh

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Web site

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

CDC-INFO

<https://wwwn.cdc.gov/dcs/ContactUs/Form>

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

