

FOOD SECURITY IMPROVES HEALTH OUTCOMES

Massachusetts has long understood the connection between hunger and health. Now we are proving that increased food security can improve health outcomes.

During the first three years of the of the Flexible Services Program, Project Bread has supported 7,861 unique individuals from three Accountable Care Organizations representing 46 community health centers, hospitals, and independent physicians' offices across Massachusetts. This revolutionary pilot program allows Medicaid dollars to be used on "non-medical" expenses to address two social determinants of health — food insecurity and housing stability.

AFTER PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM:

✘ 19% decrease

in reported food insecurity

✘ 94% of patients

reported improved health

✘ 87% of patients

felt confident in their nutrition knowledge after 6 months

✘ 30% increase

in SNAP participation

✘ 4 additional servings

of fruits and vegetables for clients per week

✘ 91% of patients

reported improved ability to prepare healthy meals

It's about more than food

One-on-one case management connects people with a wide range of goods and services for health improvements that continue beyond the program.

Project Bread provides culturally aware support in **185 languages**.



- Grocery store gift cards
- Kitchen supplies and appliances
- Cooking classes
- Nutrition counseling
- Assistance accessing SNAP, school meals, & WIC
- Information and referrals to local food pantries
- Referrals for medically tailored meals

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

INTEGRATE FOOD ACCESS INTO THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The Flexible Services Program has led to many successes in improving patients' food security and health outcomes.

Project Bread has learned many lessons about what works in assisting MassHealth clients with their nutrition needs. In order to realize the full potential of these flexibilities, we strongly urge Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to approve 1115 waivers and waiver amendments that include the following:

- ✘ Allow referral to nutrition services programs, beyond 6 months, at the discretion of the health care provider.
- ✘ Create a comprehensive care management model for nutrition services with a cost structure that includes: financial assistance for food, connection to federal and local nutrition assistance programs, nutrition and cooking education, procurement of kitchen supplies and appliances, and transportation to obtain food and education assistance.
- ✘ Maintain a requirement for all accountable care organizations to continue to engage with health-related social needs and partner with nutrition social service organizations.
- ✘ Set reimbursement rates to adequately cover staff needed to implement services and allow for annual adjustments based on inflation.

EXPAND FOOD ACCESS

In addition to the Flexible Services Program serving as an important nutrition intervention, Project Bread believes the following are necessary policies for the state and federal government to take steps to strengthen the existing anti-hunger safety net, particularly the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):

- ✘ The Healey-Driscoll Administration should prioritize implementation of the common application platform to integrate MassHealth and nutrition assistance programs.
- ✘ Congress should ensure that SNAP more adequately addresses the food needs of eligible households by increasing benefit amounts and expanding eligibility.
- ✘ The Massachusetts Legislature should pass An Act Establishing Basic Needs Assistance for Massachusetts Immigrant Residents which would ensure legally present immigrants would be able to get food and cash assistance benefits to meet their basic needs.

Project Bread is proud to partner with:

- Community Care Cooperative
- WellSense Care Alliance
- WellSense Boston Children's ACO
- WellSense Community Alliance
- WellSense Mercy Alliance
- East Boston Neighborhood Health WellSense Alliance

Food security case management provided by Project Bread is a part of MassHealth's statewide Flexible Services Pilot provided to patients by referral only. The data included in this brief is based on Community Care Cooperative patients only. Flexible Services is a pilot program and not all eligible members may receive services.

