POPULATION HEALTH PORTFOLIO: FOOD INSECURITY IN JEFFERSON

Food Insecurity is a Social Determinant of Health

Food insecurity is “the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”

Food insecurity has a number of associated short and long term sequelae. Food insecure children are at risk for health and emotional and intellectual development problems including anemia, asthma, anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders and are at higher risk of hospitalization. These health effects are pervasive and long-lasting. Children experiencing food insecurity also have increased school absences, reduced concentration and poor performances on tests. In adults, food insecurity leads to higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, and mental health issues.

In Jefferson County, the food insecurity rate is 13.6% of the population, which equates to about 4,110 community members.

The Cost of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is associated with a higher risk of chronic disease, which leads to increased health care expenses. Individuals with food insecurity had significantly greater estimated mean annualized health care expenditures – an extra $1,863 per year (avg. 2011-2013). Increased health care and expenses result in lost work days and financial trade-offs in the household, which, in turn, limit access to timely treatment and increase the need for acute health care services as well as further financial instability. In Washington State, food insecurity is estimated to account for up to $3.22B in healthcare costs.

The Role of Jefferson Healthcare

The Population Health Department at Jefferson Healthcare is developing a Food Insecurity Portfolio to address these concerns. Integrating evidence-based interventions would reduce the food insecurity and its related side effects. There are a number of interventions that will be explored through this portfolio.

- Screening for food insecurity during well-child visits;
- Providing free food in clinics to address immediate needs;
- Connecting patients with available federal nutrition programs, local departments of human services and nutritional counseling services;
- Supporting existing community organizations such as Jefferson County food banks, OlyCAP’s senior nutrition program, school districts, YMCA, backpacks for kids programs, Boiler Room, etc.;
- Collaborating with the Jefferson County Farmers’ Markets, Food Co-op and Community Supported Agriculture Programs to establish VeggieRx Program.

Importance of Community Partners

Establishing relationships and collaborations within the local food system will provide a larger perspective of our community, help connect patients with the resources they need, raise awareness about food insecurity and healthy eating, support policies related to food, and enhance our local food economy.

For further information, please contact:
Tina Herschelman
Population Health Food Insecurity Portfolio Lead
therschelm@jeffersonhealthcare.org

Citations: