

# SUMMER COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSISTANTSHIP

The AHEC Summer Community Health Assistantship offers rising second-year medical students the opportunity to work in a wide variety of community-based health, education and human service organizations throughout the Commonwealth during the summer months.

## 2021 Posters

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Kassandra Jean-Marie  
Vaccine Hesitancy in Springfield Communities of Color



# Vaccine Hesitancy in the Springfield Communities of Color



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## Introduction

Differences in the care of BIPOC and marginalized populations have been the topic of conversation for some time. However, we witnessed the reach of these issues as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research has shown that communities of color had the highest mortality rates and the lowest vaccination rates<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the goal of the Vaccination Force was to champion vaccine equity and understand what the Springfield community needs at this moment in history. This was done by creating a survey and meeting with various community organizations and associations to amplify the voices and concerns of those who reside in Springfield—gathering qualitative data will thus enable the Vaccination Force to make informed decisions in light of the pandemic.

"To save our people, we need to listen to our people"

"To make progress there needs to be one on one conversations with people. These conversations have to come from people they trust."

## Methods

A qualitative survey was created to understand vaccine hesitancy. The survey served as a foundation for the community conversations, but participants were encouraged to discuss the primary concerns of their community. Six different community organizations participated in the survey. The demographic in each association interviewed varied, which was a reflection of Springfield. The research is designed to be longitudinal. Therefore, the survey will be administered at different points in the year as we learn about COVID-19 and the variants. The survey questions were open-ended, and the data was input into an excel document. The data was separated by community organization and question. However, no identifying information was collected.



Vax Force Survey

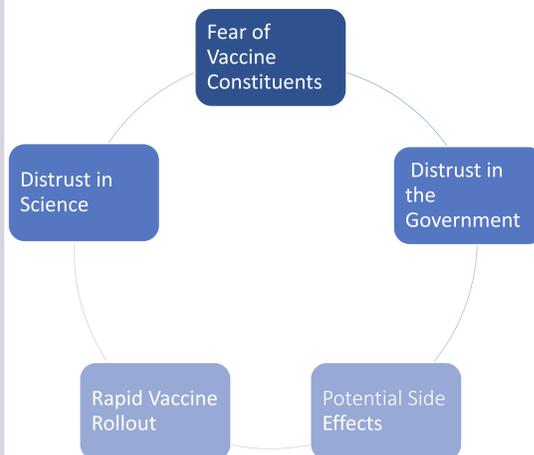
## Results/Visualization

The qualitative data collected were classified by questions asked and by neighborhood associations. This method enabled us to summarize the comments of multiple participants and analyze the similarities and differences across the different community groups. In addition, due to the diversity of the community groups interviewed, we collected information from various areas in Springfield, allowing us to understand how demographic information may play a role in vaccine hesitancy. Finally, the information obtained was periodically presented to the Vaccination Force and utilized to inform vaccine outreach projects.

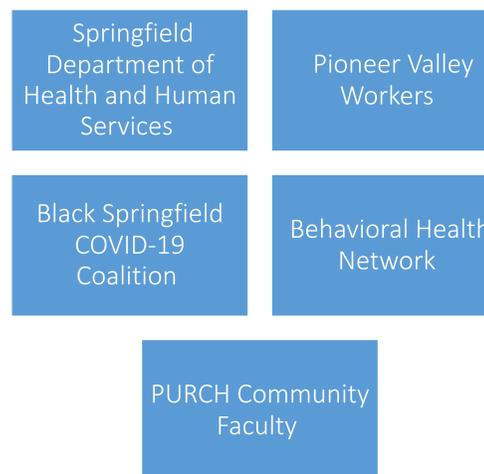
Springfield Neighborhood Map<sup>2</sup>



The main objective of the survey was to understand the primary reasons behind vaccine hesitancy. Five main themes were discovered across the multiple community discussions. These were the primary reasons cited regarding why individuals in the community were hesitant to receive the vaccine.



Paramount to this research was the community partnerships that were forged. Collecting the qualitative data required the creation of a community partnership database. The image to the right depicts the Springfield community organizations dedicated to serving the community and alleviating the disparities that occurred as a result of COVID-19.



## Conclusions

People of color and marginalized communities have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>3</sup>. This event has shown us that the inherent racism and discriminatory healthcare system thought to be a thing of the past is still an issue in modern-day America. When looking at which communities suffered the most losses, it was those with a high number of people of color. As the vaccine rollout occurred, these instances of inequity and injustice again showed themselves when looking at vaccination data. People of color have the lowest vaccination rates. The Springfield Vaccination Force was dedicated to understanding the reasons behind these issues. By utilizing a qualitative survey, we facilitated multiple open forum discussions with members of the community. We found that the primary reasons behind vaccine hesitancy included fear of the vaccine constituents coupled with distrust in the government and healthcare system. It is important to note that people of color's doubt in our medical system is not baseless. Tuskegee was a notorious case of medical injustice where ethics were completely disregarded. This example, among others, was repeatedly cited in the community discussions. These stories get passed down through families and friends and become a cautionary tale and tangible proof of how the government and healthcare system has not always treated people of color humanely. We need to recognize the harm of these instances and continue to be transparent about current scientific processes. By allowing the community to voice their concerns, we could obtain valuable information and listen to the voice of a marginalized population that has been silenced for too long.

## Future Work

Our work is far from over. Every day we gain new information about the COVID-19 pandemic and its variants. We also recognize that public perception is changing as we gain more information about the virus. It is for these reasons this study was designed to be longitudinal. The ultimate goal is to return to the community associations and organizations periodically to obtain qualitative data on the changing perceptions and to continue this dialogue with community members.

## Acknowledgments

- Springfield Vaccination Force
- Dr. Kathleen Szegda
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- New North Citizens Council
- Maple-High/Six Corners Neighborhood Council
- Indian Orchard Citizens Council
- Springfield Department of Health and Human Services
- Black Springfield COVID-19 Coalition
- PURCH Community Faculty
- Pioneer Valley Workers

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# Understanding Food Insecurity in Springfield and Identifying Gaps in Food Systems



ADVANCING CARE.  
ENHANCING LIVES.

Laura F Labb

University of Massachusetts Medical School, Baystate Health,  
Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services

## Introduction

- Springfield, MA is considered a food desert, with many residents lacking access to a grocery store or having fresh fruits and vegetables available.
- Studies have shown that food insecurity can lead to negative health outcomes among children, non-senior adults, and senior adults<sup>1</sup>.
- The connection between chronic disease and food insecurity has been consistent in past studies, with many finding that food insecurity was tied to an increased prevalence of diabetes<sup>2</sup>.
- MLK Jr. Family Services offers weekly emergency food pantry services and bimonthly mobile food pantries as well as nutrition services such as food demonstrations.
- With the receipt of the Where Health Matters grant to address food security in Springfield, we sought to understand what current food systems exist within the population and what needs the community has so that we can fill gaps in addressing food security and nutrition.

## Methods

- Current food systems were investigated via an online review of resources available addressing food security. We specifically looked to identify pantries, nutrition programs, and clinical sites addressing food security. We reached out to community leaders after identification of key players and met to discuss current projects.
- To identify community needs, an 8-question survey (Figure 1) was developed to be employed at MLK's emergency food pantry and at the mobile food truck. The survey was written in English and then translated to have a Spanish copy available on site as well. Shoppers leaving the food pantry or mobile food truck were offered a choice of prizes for their participation in the survey.

Thank you for agreeing to take this survey to better understand our community needs regarding food insecurity!

Name (if comfortable including): \_\_\_\_\_

- Why is the mobile food truck important to you? Select all that apply.
  - It is easy to access
  - I would not have food otherwise
  - They provide healthy options
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you use other food pantries?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Which ones?: \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you have a chronic disease?
  - Yes
  - No
- Would you be interested in receiving resources and education about nutrition while at the food truck?
  - Yes
  - No
- What resources are currently available to you?
  - SNAP/HIP
  - WIC
  - Nutrition education
  - Support from local organizations
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Does your primary care physician offer you resources relating to food security/nutrition or talk to you about food security and nutrition?
  - Yes
  - No
- What resources do you need outside of food and nutrition?
  - Child Care
  - Transportation
  - Housing
  - Cancer Survivorship support groups
  - Substance Use Treatment
  - Healthcare / Dental care
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Would you participate in a focus group or health seminar to give us more information about your answers? Participants would receive an additional \$50 gift card.
  - Yes. Best contact information (phone or email): \_\_\_\_\_
  - No

Figure 1: Example of Survey given to Community Members at MLK Emergency Pantry and Mobile Food Truck

## Results

- Based on an initial review of current food systems, 21 organizations in the Springfield area were identified as addressing food insecurity
  - 4 community partners were met with: the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Live Well Springfield Coalition, Baystate Health, and the High Street Clinic
  - The Baystate Medical Center Clinics screened for food insecurity using a standardized Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) screening survey (Figure 2). The screening is given yearly to all ACO Medicaid patients.
  - Within the Baystate clinics, High Street's food distribution services offers fresh produce and non-perishables in the afternoon on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month and the morning on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays of the month, but cited funding as a difficulty
- Of the 40 participants surveyed, 75% indicated they were interested in receiving education about nutrition while at the MLK Family Services pantry or mobile truck
  - 50% of users had a chronic disease
  - 72.5% talked with their PCP about food security or nutrition
  - 57.5% reported using the pantry because of their healthy options
  - 50% of users used another food pantry
  - 52.5% had SNAP/HIP available to them
  - Of the other resources needed, 25% reported housing and 32.5% reported dental/healthcare as important

## Conclusions

- The food distribution services at High Street Clinic were identified as a potential area for partnership with MLK Family Services. We are hopeful that we would be able to provide them with nutrition education resources as well as funding for projects.
- Analysis of the survey indicates that the pantry and mobile food truck are great resources to supplement food shopping with healthy options and not as the shopper's only source of food.
- Participants noted that the two greatest needs in the community regarding food security were housing and dental/healthcare, which is interesting given that the primary issue identified by the 2019 Baystate Community Health Needs Assessment at a rural food pantry was transportation<sup>3</sup>.
- A limitation of this survey is that we only asked participants who did have access to the pantry and mobile food truck. Therefore, there may be community members who cannot access the site and have a need for transportation, but we did not reach them with our survey because we conducted it on site.
- The prevalence of chronic diseases reported, 50%, was about equal to the prevalence of chronic diseases among US adults, which is 51.8%<sup>4</sup>. This does not suggest a stronger connection between chronic disease and food insecurity, but still highlights the needs for nutrition education among all populations.

## Citations

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## Acknowledgements

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ACO Health - Related Social Needs Screening

This section for office use only.

How was the screening conducted?  
 In person  By phone  
 By mail  By email

In the past year, have you (your child) been able to get any of the following when it was really needed? Select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> Utilities (heat or gas)	<input type="checkbox"/> Insurance
<input type="checkbox"/> Medication/Health Care (Medical, Dental, Mental Health, Vision)	<input type="checkbox"/> Swaddled/tied
<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> None true
<input type="checkbox"/> Employment and/or education	<input type="checkbox"/> Choose not to answer this question
<input type="checkbox"/> Phone	<input type="checkbox"/> None
<input type="checkbox"/> Internet	
<input type="checkbox"/> Clothing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Childcare	
<input type="checkbox"/> No living children been able to get all the above when needed	
<input type="checkbox"/> Choose not to answer this question	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	

Within the past 12 months, you worried that your (your child's) food would run out before you got money to buy more?  
 Often true  
 Sometimes true  
 Never true  
 Choose not to answer this question  
 None

How often do you (your child) see or talk to people that you care about and feel close to? (Ex: talking to friends on the phone, visiting friends or family, going to church or club meetings).

<input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a week
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 or 2 times a week
<input type="checkbox"/> 3 or 4 times a week
<input type="checkbox"/> Choose not to answer this question
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

What is your (your child's) housing situation today? \*Feel free to check all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> I/my child do not have housing	<input type="checkbox"/> I/my child have housing but are worried about losing it
<input type="checkbox"/> I/my child have housing	<input type="checkbox"/> Choose not to answer this question
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	

Do you (your child) feel physically and emotionally safe where you (your child) currently live?  
 Yes  
 No  
 Unsure  
 Choose not to answer this question

Would you (your child) like help connecting to resources? Select from below.

<input type="checkbox"/> Housing	<input type="checkbox"/> Employment and/or education
<input type="checkbox"/> Food	<input type="checkbox"/> Social support
<input type="checkbox"/> Utilities (heat or gas)	<input type="checkbox"/> Insurance/vehicle insurance
<input type="checkbox"/> Any health care	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	

Figure 2: SDOH Screening Survey given by Baystate Health

# A Guide to Farmers Markets Accepting HIP in Springfield

Rose May, Erica Langevin, Dawn Distefano

University of Massachusetts Medical School – Summer Service Learning Assistantship

## Goals

- As a summer service learning assist, I was partnered with Square One to research and understand the access to fresh produce in the Springfield community. The short term goal is make information about where and when affordable fresh produce is available to families in Springfield through the SNAP/HIP program. The long term goal is the address food insecurity for the families of Square One.
- 
- The goals for the SSLA included:
  - Research SNAP/HIP farmer's markets in Springfield MA
  - Locate public transportation from Square One locations to farmer's market destinations
  - Create a booklet including farmer's market information as well as transportation that can be distributed among the community.

## Scope of Work

In addition to providing high-quality early education, Square One programs place emphasis on fitness and nutrition initiatives to promote long-term health and wellness. One such support service assists with SNAP eligibility. With the success of SNAP enrollment, Square One is striving to expand access to fresh produce through enrollment into the SNAP/HIP program. By enrolling more families into the HIP program and making access to information about the HIP approved farmer's markets more readily available Square One works to lessen the burden of food insecurity seen in Springfield.

## Demonstrated need

"In the current community population, 100% of children and families living at or below the poverty level; 90% of children and families report lack of access and/or use of recommended daily use of fresh fruits and vegetables; over 40% of Square One children measure as obese/overweight; and families report a lack of knowledge, skill and awareness of healthy diet and physical activity as it correlates to chronic disease and long term illness." Data provided by Square One

Per Springfield Food Policy Council, "In the Mason Square community of Springfield, 9% of households experienced moderate to severe hunger and 19% were food insecure. Close to 60% of Springfield's K-12 Students are overweight or obese, and many are rapidly heading towards a lifetime of chronic disease such as diabetes and heart disease."

## What is HIP?

The Health Incentive Program (HIP) allows SNAP/Food Stamp recipients to be able to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers markets, farm stands, CSA's, and mobile markets.

This program is unique because it allows SNAP recipients to earn extra money on their cards as an incentive for buying local produce.

**Earn More SNAP Dollars with the Healthy Incentives Program!**

Spend your SNAP dollars on farm-fresh fruits and vegetables at participating Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) retailers and have the amount of your purchase instantly added back to your EBT card!

**Farmers Markets**  
Look for participating farmers at regularly scheduled markets in your town or nearby, selling fresh fruits and vegetables.

**Farm Stands**  
On-farm stores where you can buy fresh fruits and vegetables, right from the hands that picked them.

**Mobile Markets**  
Markets that bring farm-fresh produce right to your community.

**CSA Farm Shares**  
Membership-based service that provides your family with fresh fruits and vegetables every week.

Look at what you can earn each month! (based on household size)

**\$40** 1-2 PEOPLE | **\$60** 3-5 PEOPLE | **\$80** 6+ PEOPLE

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Square One, especially Dawn Distefano and Erica Langevin for allowing me to partner with them on this project. Thank you to Justin Ayala and Dr. Sarah McAdoo for organizing and supporting us in the Baystate SSLA. Lastly, thank you to the numerous community members who offered me guidance and advice on how to best serve Square One!

## Takeaways

During the SSLA experience, I researched the availability of fresh produce in the Springfield area. This research allowed me to compile and create an informational booklet for Square One families to use when navigating farmer's markets in the area that are a part of HIP. I am excited to work with Square One in the Interprofessional Health Equity Incubator (IHEI) program.

**Farmer's market availability such as months, days and hours of operation are not easily accessible**

- Using the dtafinder website I researched farmer's markets in the area that are a part of the HIP program. Through this research I was able to see first-hand how challenging it can be to find a market based on one's availability as each one is open during different months, days of the week, and has individualized hours. Due to this complexity, I determined that it would be beneficial to create a booklet with all of this information, organized by neighborhood. Furthermore families could more easily access details of the farmer's markets close to them that were open during convenient times.

**Determining public transportation routes to HIP associated markets can be difficult**

- Public transportation to farmer's markets in Springfield can again prove to be challenging. Although the dtafinder website can identify markets in the area, there is no way on the website to navigate to these destinations. As transportation can be a major barrier to accessing these markets, I determined bus routes to each individual market from both Square One locations.

**Creating a single deliverable containing information about farmer's markets participating in HIP is helpful**

- After compiling specifics about each market and the available public transportation routes to each I wanted to create a single place where this information could become accessible. I created a farmer's market booklet guide for Square One families containing addresses, operation months/days/hours as well as visuals indicating where the markets are located in the city. Finally, I included contact information for each market as well as specifics about services that each one offers.

**Providing families with a roadmap to farmer's markets in their area when explaining HIP will lead to more engagement in the program.**

- Throughout my SSLA experience I was struck by the gap in available information between enrolling in HIP and actually participating – finding a market close by, determining when to go and how to get there. Each of these steps seemed like potential roadblocks for utilizing the program for how it is intended. It is my hope that the guidebook for Square One families will help to prevent some of these potential roadblocks and make accessing fresh affordable produce easier.

# Laying Community Groundwork for Baystate's Mobile Health Bus

Georgia Bancheri  
Baystate Medical Center



## Background

The Wellness on Wheels (WoW) Mobile Health Bus is Baystate Health's recent initiative to both improve access to care for underserved populations in the Springfield area as well as educate health professional students with a community-centered, social justice and equity lens.

The bus is guided and informed by the community and their needs. Consultation with community partners and needs assessments informed the bus to focus its efforts on COVID-19, mental health and food insecurity. The bus will soon also provide preventative health services directly to the people, including screening, education and referrals. The goal is to meet the community where they are at.

## Implementation

### Juneteenth Celebration

The inaugural launch of the bus occurred this July with a celebration of Juneteenth. Baystate Health employees were welcomed to tour the bus and watch a narrated PowerPoint featuring the nation's history of healthcare injustices against Africans and African Americans as well as key figures in the fight to attain equitable care.

### Mental Health

As a priority community need, the bus began its efforts to identify the built environment of mental health in the area. New partnerships with community stakeholders were made. Well-being surveys were developed and distributed at local fairs to determine future educational tools. A specific parent well-being survey with additional questions regarding children's physical health was developed to determine needed parent-specific educational resources.

### COVID-19 Vaccine Education

The bus joined the Martin Luther King Food Justice Fair in July where it provided education on vaccine safety to a largely vaccine-hesitant population. Educational content for the health professional student volunteers was developed to promote factual and respectful dialogue with the community.



## Next Steps

The bus will continue to be a presence at community events to build trust and best determine the community's needs.

### Mental Health Education and Access

More surveys will be distributed to better determine educational resources that would benefit the community. The WoW team will continue to develop relationships with community partners to best inform its effort to improve access to mental health care and produce effective educational content.

### COVID-19 Education and Vaccination Efforts

The bus will continue its educational efforts and plans to become a mobile vaccine distributor in the near future.