

Baystate Health WOW Bus: Addressing Food Insecurity in Mason Square Using Daily Table as a Model

PURCH Population Health Clerkship 2022

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Summary

- **Who are we? Who's on your team** We're a group of pharmacy interns and a medical student
- **Where are we?** We worked on the WOW bus in the Mason Square neighborhood of Springfield, MA
- **Goal:** Increase access to healthier food options, and empower residents to make healthier food choices in order to reduce chronic disease incidence
- **Why addressing this issue is important?**
 - Many diet-related diseases including hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease (CVD) are associated with food insecurity
 - Mason Square is considered an urban food desert meaning greater than 33% of the population lives more than a mile away from a full service supermarket
 - Approximately 25-35% of residents in Mason Square live below the poverty line forcing residents to choose less nutritious food options due to budgetary constraints
 - Attempts to bring a full-service grocer to the area have been unsuccessful

Experiential Learning

How? Utilized strategic partnerships to identify community needs through a precision, community-centered approach to healthcare delivery

- Participated in food distribution alongside staff at MLK Jr. Community Center
- Performed blood pressure screenings and provided educational materials to residents regarding chronic disease management and prevention
- Noted trends in resident food selection that may contribute to an unbalanced diet
- Considered barriers to accessing healthy food options including, but not limited to transportation and financial stability

Advocacy Pitch

As medical and pharmacy interns working on the WOW Bus, we have identified some of the community needs regarding healthy food access and the negative impact it has had on the Mason Square neighborhood over the years. Approximately 70% of residents in the Mason square community are considered low-income and lack access to healthy and fresh food options. After volunteering at the MLK Jr. Family Services Emergency Food Pantry Program, it became even more evident that the pantry was not an emergency food pantry, it was, and has been a necessity for many of the residents in the area. As someone who went to High School just up the street, I reflect on how many classmates of mine likely relied on the pantry in order to meet their nutritional needs. This was an issue then, and still remains an issue, and that simply cannot continue.

Upon realizing how endemic the issue of food insecurity is, we identified an approach to increase access to healthier food options, while empowering residents to make better choices around their eating habits. As an anchor institution, Baystate Health should consider a small-scale grocery store, using Daily Table as a model, which will be able to provide residents access to nutritious, high-quality foods at prices designed to work with SNAP budgets. This non-profit, local grocer would contain a teaching kitchen offering free cooking and nutrition courses provided by community partners, and local university students, allowing residents to take an active role in living a healthier lifestyle. To find out more information, here is a link to Daily Table, <https://daillytable.org>.

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