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Ashley Atiyeh
Elizabeth Blasberg
Katelyn Cushanick
Daniel Edberg
Mairin Jerome

See next page for additional authors

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Authors
Ashley Atiyeh, Elizabeth Blasberg, Katelyn Cushanick, Daniel Edberg, Mairin Jerome, Patrick Ng, Rob Meehan, and Jan Carney

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3 Squares VT Food Assistance Usage by Patrons at the Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf

Atiyeh, A., Blasberg, L., Cushanick, K., Edberg, D., Jerome, M., Ng, P., Meehan, R., Carney, J., University of Vermont College of Medicine

Introduction

- The federally funded 3SquaresVT program (formerly Food Stamps) increases access to healthy food and helps to stimulate local economies.
- 10.9% of Vermont households are food insecure and 15.8% of children live in food insecure households.
- Many families are eligible for 3SquaresVT but choose not to enroll, hurting Vermont’s economy and stressing charitable organizations like the Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf (CEFS).

Objective

This study aimed to examine the percentage of eligible food shelf patrons who are not using federal food assistance and the barriers involved.

Methods

- Eight question survey administered to patrons at CEFS
- Designed to assess usage of 3SquaresVT and collect demographic data
- 206 willing patrons interviewed
- Responses recorded on paper, transferred to MS Excel
- Four surveys were excluded due to incompleteness
- 202 responses broken into categories of gender, age, household size, and time of the month patron visited CEFS
- Chi-squared analysis of each category according to usage and awareness performed using OpenEpi version 2.3.1
- Graphs exported from data on MS Excel

Results

- Awareness of 3SquaresVT
  - Figure 1: 94% of the 202 individuals surveyed were aware of the program.
  - Figure 2: Of those aware, 61% were participating in 3SquaresVT.

- Barriers Preventing Participation
  - Figure 3: Patrons who frequent the CEFS during the second half of the calendar month are 1.7 times more likely to utilize 3SquaresVT.

- Participation in 3SquaresVT by Month
  - Figure 4: Of those using 3SquaresVT, the main reason for the lack of satisfaction was the program did not offer enough money.
  - Figure 5: Not qualifying, convenience, and difficulty of applying are the main factors preventing participation in 3SquaresVT.

- Participation in 3SquaresVT by Gender
  - Figure 6: Women are 1.9 times more likely to participate in 3SquaresVT than men.

Conclusion

Reasons For Not Participating in 3SquaresVT

- Forty-two percent of respondents not participating reported not qualifying for the program.
- Most reported ineligibility due to receiving other benefits (disability/SSI) or an income level that is too high to qualify.

Awareness of Available Resources

- Twelve percent of respondents reported being unaware of the program or not knowing how to enroll.

Application Process and Convenience

- Women are 1.9 times more likely to participate in 3SquaresVT than men.
- Patrons who use CEFS during the second half of the month are 1.7 times more likely to use 3SquaresVT.

Recommendations:

- Screen patrons to determine eligibility for 3SquaresVT.
- Incorporate education about 3SquaresVT into CEFS applicant’s initial intake interview and subsequent visits.
- Cohorts such as men and patrons in the first half of the month should be targeted since they are least likely to be participating in 3SquaresVT.
- Fifty-two percent of 3SquaresVT participants are not satisfied with the amount of resources they receive. Efforts should be made to determine how supplemental resources can be improved to meet the needs of Chittenden County’s underserved population.

References