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## Healthy Affordable Food in Milton, VT

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# Healthy Affordable Food in Milton, VT

Providing Local and Online Resources for Patients in the AVS

Milton Family Medicine, Milton VT

Nick Brunette, MS3

Family Medicine, July – August 2022

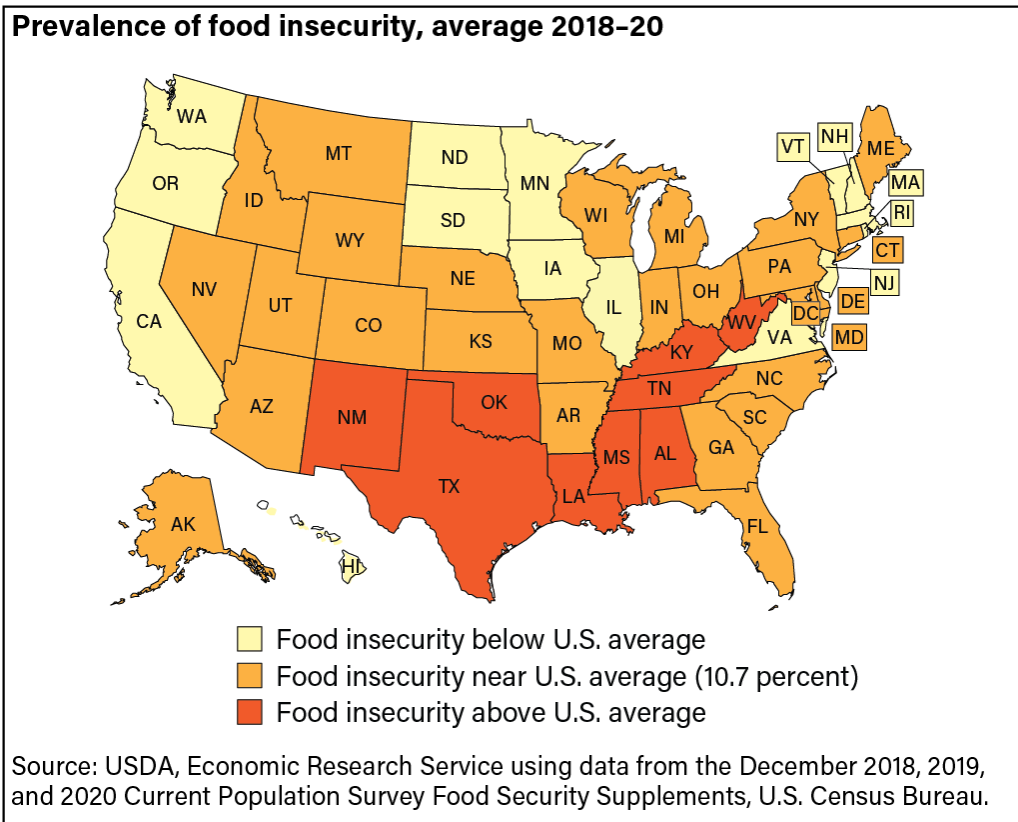
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The University of Vermont  
LARNER COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

# Problem Identification 1a:

## Social Determinants of Health - Food Insecurity National Data & Recent Trends



- Food insecurity is a national problem that affected approximately 10.7% of households in 2020 (USDA Economic Research Service, 2020)
- The disruption caused by COVID-19 has likely only increased this number and disproportionately affects low-income children and families (Tester et al, 2020).
- More recently, inflation has also likely contributed to increasing food insecurity rates with the June 2022 Consumer Price Index demonstrating a 10.4% increase in the food index over the past 12 months, the greatest increase over 1 year since 1981 (US Bureau of Labor News Release, Consumer Price Index, June 2022)

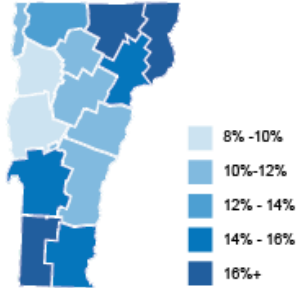
# Problem Identification 1b:

## Social Determinants of Health – Food Insecurity

### Vermont Data & 2022 Chittenden Community Needs Assessment

- 27% of Vermont households classified as food insecure (Niles, Meredith et al, 2021.)

**Reliance on food aid is highest in the north** Share of population receiving 3SquaresVT benefits, by county, March 2018



Data sources: Vermont Department for Children and Families and U.S. Census Bureau Population Division, Annual Estimates of Resident Population, 2017

*Vermont Jobs Brief, May 2018. Public Assets Institute.*

#### What Community Members Shared in the 2022 Chittenden Community Health Needs Assessment:

- Transportation is a barrier for residents to get the food they need
- Stigma can impact individuals' participation in food assistance programs
- Need for expanded home delivery meal services
- Current free school meals need to incorporate higher quality, more nutritious foods
- Community gardens are an important asset

# 1 in 3

**Vermonters have experienced food insecurity since March 2020**

Food insecurity in Vermont is at an all-time high since the start of COVID-19 (McCarthy et al., 2021).

This number has increased from the estimated 1 in 10 Vermonters experiencing food security in 2019 (Feeding America, 2019).

*2022 Community Health Needs Assessment, Chittenden & Grand Isle Counties*

# Public Health Cost:

- Food insecurity is associated with increased risk of hospitalization, poor overall health, anemia, nutritional deficiencies, cognitive issues, asthma, and anxiety in children compared to food-secure children whereas adults are more likely to have increased rates of depression, diabetes, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia (Gundersen et al, 2015).
- Food insecurity has a significant effect on the likelihood of being stressed or depressed (Pourmotabbed et al, 2020)
- Estimated cost of excess US healthcare expenditures associated with food insecurity was \$52.9 billion in 2016 (Berkowitz et al, 2019)
- Another report by the Bread for the World Institute estimated a conservative cost of \$160 billion in 2014 USD related to food insecurity including mental health costs, hospitalizations, and lost productivity (Cook & Poblacion, 2016)

# Community Perspective:

## Milton, VT

*Bridget Shea, RD*

*UVVMC Community Health Team at Milton Family Practice*

“...food insecurity is definitely prevalent in the patient population of the practice. Many patients talk about how expensive it is to transition to a healthier diet. Also, a lot of people don't have the skills to cook/prepare food in a way that is cost effective. In these cases, even if the desire it there, there are a lot of barriers to eating healthier and more home-prepared foods.”

*Brenda Tourangeau*

*Milton Family Community Center*

“We see a very wide variety of needs in Milton and our surrounding areas which we serve. Seniors, young families and those in some form of life changes like an illness, loss of job or housing. We do our best to always make sure we have fresh produce available in our self-select area at our food shelf at MFCC.”

“We are a Farm To School grantee and we have an onsite garden the children care for. Starting kids on whole fresh foods when they are young is key. One Mom told me her son wanted the fresh green beans at the store and she knew it was due to the fact he picked them in our garden and was even eating them raw. Accessibility and education at a young age is huge then follow up with recipes and taste tests and it's a win-win!”

# Intervention and Methodology:

## Patient Education Materials

- Provide education and access to local resources to patients and families via an Epic dot phrase that can populate into MyChart Communications or the After Visit Summary
  - Includes material about the emergency food shelf at Milton Family Community Center as well as other online and local resources such as Vermont sponsored programs (VIC, 35Squares), and the 2-1-1 information phone number
  - Resources for shopping and food prepping on a budget
  - Information about other local programs and resources
  - Can be utilized by clinic staff and providers when food insecurity or access to healthy affordable food is identified as a concern during a patient visit

# Results:

- Created a dot phrase *.foodinfo* that was made available to physicians and residents
  - Announced at faculty meeting
  - What is a dot phrase? A dot phrase can be typed into the medical record which then automatically inserts pre-determined relevant material
  - Includes information on local food shelves, in particular resources available through the Milton Family Community Center as well as several notable online resources with information on affordable healthy eating
- Anecdotally received positive feedback from 4 clinic physicians about inclusion of a dot phrase in the After Visit Summary

Concerned about access to healthy and affordable food? Here are some local and online resources that might be available to you:

**Milton Family Community Center** (23 Villemaire Lane, Milton, VT – 0.8 miles from MFM clinic)

The MFCC Emergency Food Shelf is accessible by appointment Monday through Friday, 10:00am to 2:00pm. Please call (802) 893-1457. Walk-ins are accepted but calling is preferred. They also have a garden program for young children. <https://miltonfamilycenter.org/emergency-food-shelf/>

**St. Ann's Church Food Shelf** (41 Main St, Milton, VT 05468 – 1.8 miles from MFM clinic)

The food shelf is open during Rectory Hours: Monday-Friday 9:45am-2:45pm and is located in the Parish Rectory. Patrons may come get a bag weekly, as needed. Toiletry bags are given out once, monthly. We encourage you to call ahead at (802) 893-2487 to ensure that we have bags available, as they are first come, first serve. <https://stanmilton.com/food-shelf>

**Call 2-1-1 on your phone**

Free, confidential information and referral program which helps connect Vermonters to community, health, and human resources and services.

**Online Resources for Eating Healthy on a Budget**

Recommended by our Milton Family Practice Community Health Team Dietician:

<https://www.eatingwell.com/recipes/19339/cooking-methods-styles/budget/>

**Vermont/Chittenden County Specific Resources:**

1. VT Dept of Health – Resources for Food Help & Access to Healthy Diets  
<https://humanresources.vermont.gov/food-help>  
<https://www.healthvermont.gov/mymoment/#eating-healthy>
2. UVM Medical Center - Healthy Resources  
<https://www.uvmhealth.org/medcenter/wellness-resources/health-library/zx3463>
3. Food Access for Women, Infants, and Children - WIC  
<https://www.healthvermont.gov/local/burlington/wic>

**Other Resources:**

1. CDC – Tips for Healthy Eating on a Budget:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/healthy-eating-budget.html>
2. US Dept of Agriculture – Tips for Healthy Eating on a Budget  
<https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/healthy-eating-budget>
3. National Institute of Health – Overcoming Roadblocks to Healthy Eating  
<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/overcoming-roadblocks-healthy-eating>

# Evaluating Effectiveness & Limitations:

## Ways to potentially evaluate effectiveness:

- Consult with the Milton Family Community Center and track the number of people accessing the food shelf
- Track how often the dot phrase is utilized or survey physicians on residents on how often they use the dot phrase
- Screen patients marked as food insecure by the Social Determinants of Health screening tool in Epic and correlate that to utilization of the dot phrase during their visits
- A follow-up survey could be sent to patients who received the information to see if they utilized any of the resources provided

## Limitations

- Doesn't address all barriers to food insecurity (i.e. transportation)
- Staff must remember to utilize the dot phrase as it does not auto-populate into the AVS
- Failure to screen for or identify food insecurity in the first place

# Recommendations for Future:

- Leverage EMR technology to streamline insertion of food resources into patient AVS without a dot phrase
  - Find a way to auto-populate resources into patient communication materials if food insecurity is marked as a concern in the Social Determinants of Health screening tool
- Expand partnerships with local community resources like Milton Family Community Center and St. Ann's Church
- Expand upon the Milton Family Medicine community garden program

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