



Community Health Briefs

Triangle Neighborhood Program — SSM Health/Dean Health Plan

Innovation Strategy

Innate in the mission and values of Dean Health Plan and its parent organization SSM Health is a focus on compassion, stewardship and community. These principles are demonstrated by their engagement in improving community health and addressing health disparities. Following a community health needs assessment, SSM Health and Dean Health Plan identified mental health, maternal child health and chronic disease (specifically heart disease and diabetes) as areas of focus for potential partnerships with other community organizations. One such partnership was formed with Second Harvest, a hunger-relief charity, to support diabetic-friendly food boxes in local pantries. Through the partnership, SSM Health and Dean Health Plan have had the opportunity to volunteer and support a mobile pantry in an underserved area, the Triangle Neighborhood.

Bordered by three intersecting streets, the Triangle Neighborhood in Madison, Wisconsin is known for its distinctive shape and its community spirit. It is also a place where the mostly low-income residents have unmet needs. Working with nurses affiliated with SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital – Madison along with several chaplains, common social determinants of health such as inadequate housing and limited access to food are addressed. Partnering with Second Harvest, SSM Health and Dean Health Plan volunteers run the mobile food pantry that serves more than 100 people in an hour.

Root Determinants of Health Addressed in This Initiative

- Diet
- Health Literacy
- Livable Communities

Program Description

SSM Health and Dean Health Plan's partnership with community organizations supporting the Triangle Neighborhood began in 2015, with the duo assuming leadership for the mobile food pantry initiative in 2016. The Triangle Neighborhood is characterized by older individuals representing several minority populations including Hmong, African-American and Latino, many of whom are mentally or physically challenged. Many of these individuals lack the resources to seek out health care services or fresh food options.



Along with Second Harvest and members of a local church, SSM Health and Dean Health Plan volunteers regularly staff a mobile food pantry with more than thirty volunteers each month that is set up in the community room of one of the neighborhood's

apartment complexes. All are welcome to shop the pantry, with no restrictions on income or place of residence. While most pantry shoppers come from the Triangle Neighborhood, others in need just outside of the boundaries have been known to shop the pantry as well.

Volunteers work with community members to encourage healthy choices, suggest trying new foods and provide applicable recipes outlining how to prepare many of the unfamiliar foods. Not only are volunteers there to help individuals and families shop, they are also building rapport within the community as a trusted and friendly voice. According to Jennifer Ellestad, community relations manager at SSM Health, “a handshake and smile, and treating them with respect—these are a big part of what we provide. We are building relationships, and it doesn’t matter to us if they are Dean Health Plan members or not. They are part of the community we serve.”

Results

On average, SSM Health and Dean Health Plan volunteers serve approximately 115 people an hour during each mobile food pantry. Many individuals do not have access to fresh food on a day-to-day basis, so the Triangle Neighborhood market has become an asset to the community and a needed lifeline for many. Volunteers have found they are influencing the health of community members one fresh food at a time. Market shoppers report on how new recipes turn out and share with volunteers their new perspectives on fresh vegetables. The personal touch of treating community members with dignity and respect as they come to shop has also forged a strong bond of respect among SSM Health, Dean Health Plan and the Triangle Neighborhood.

As SSM Health and Dean Health Plan’s leadership role within this program expands, partnerships continue to develop and evolve with other community organizations. For example, a local ambulance company works within the Triangle Neighborhood to provide foot and wound care to community members. In addition, the local nursing school provides education on chronic disease management and foot care for members of the community. According to Ellestad, “there is great power in collaborating to improve the health of our community. We see our work there as a way to promote good health, which is better for everyone.” As the needs of the Triangle Neighborhood grow and rapport continues to build, the hope is to expand what SSM Health and Dean Health Plan can offer the community.

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