



Community Health Briefs

Hunger Free Colorado — Kaiser Permanente

Innovation Strategy

Kaiser Permanente understands that addressing the social and behavioral needs of members is critical to the organization's mission of improving the health of its members and the communities it serves. In order to meet the social and behavioral needs of members, new systems and partnerships are needed. The collaboration between Kaiser Permanente and Hunger Free Colorado illustrates a clinic and community partnership, which has resulted in improved food security for Coloradans.

Hunger Free Colorado was launched in 2009 from a merger of the Colorado Anti-Hunger Network and the Colorado Food Bank Association, with funding support from The Denver Foundation and Kaiser Permanente Colorado (KPCO). The program aims to bring a unified, statewide voice to the issue and solutions surrounding hunger, with a goal of ensuring that all Coloradans have access to affordable, nutritious food.

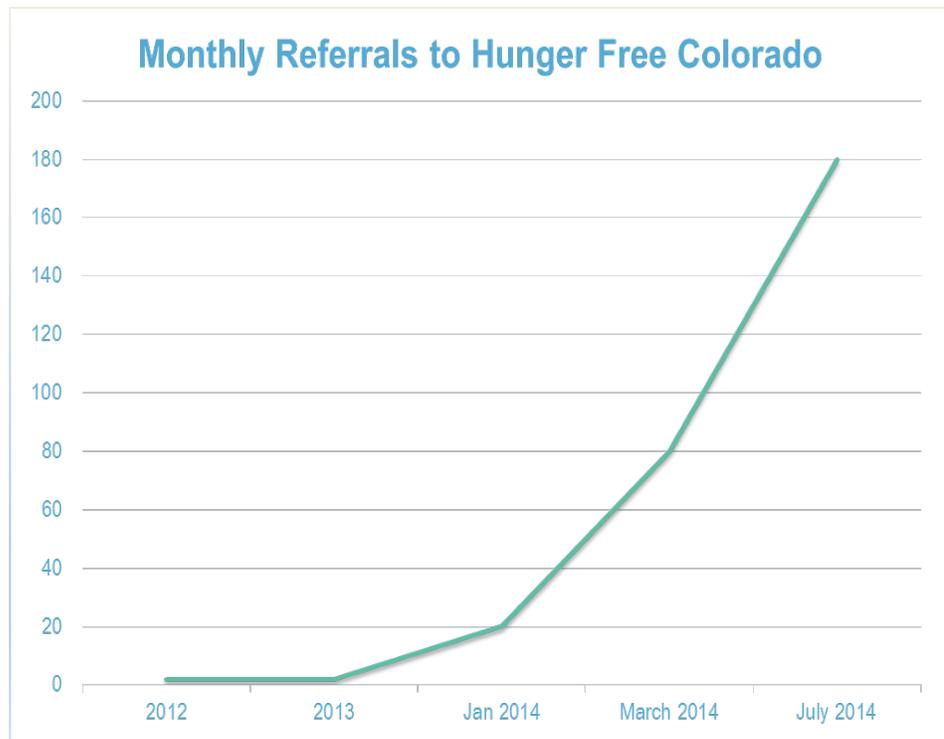
Root Determinants of Health Addressed in This Initiative

- Diet
- Mental Health
- Stable Income
- Healthy Thinking

Program Description

In 2011, KPCO began asking two validated food-insecurity questions at two pediatric clinics. Families who were struggling to afford food were given the Hunger Free Colorado Hotline phone number and instructed to call for resources. Only 5 percent of members called the hotline. In an effort to improve engagement, KPCO changed the process and asked for members' permission to provide Hunger Free Colorado with their contact information. Hunger Free Colorado then contacted these members to determine eligibility and enroll members in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Women Infants and Children program, and refer them to food pantries, for group meals and other food resources. Using this approach, KPCO connected approximately 78 percent of individuals to resources. The food security screening and referral program has since expanded to 10 medical departments, including Medicare Total Health Assessment, Diabetes Care Management and Obstetrics.

To integrate the hunger screening into clinical settings, a project team works with participating departments to increase awareness of the prevalence of food insecurity and the specific population health impacts (for example, food insecurity in pregnancy is associated with a higher incidence of gestational diabetes, maternal depression and anxiety, low birth weight infants



Graph depicts the number of referrals KPCO made to Hunger Free Colorado from 2012 - July 2014

and deficiencies in iron and folate). After the project team increases awareness of the health impacts of food insecurity, the team supports the care providers in determining how to incorporate hunger screening into their care delivery workflow with minimal disruption. Additionally, training is provided on communication skills to reduce the stigma associated with food insecurity and increase acceptance of food resources by members.

Hunger Free Colorado tracks referrals from organizations and provides member-level data regarding connection to food resources to health organizations. This information is critical to process improvements and increasing referrals.

Results

Since 2012, more than 4,205 members have been referred to Hunger Free Colorado, with Hunger Free Colorado successfully providing outreach to approximately 80 percent. Hunger Free Colorado has referred more than 340 members to SNAP and more than 4,000 members have been referred to local food pantries.

Recognizing the success of this approach, Kaiser Permanente has spread the initiative beyond Colorado to additional Kaiser Permanente service areas and other medical systems. In September 2014 Kaiser Permanente Northwest, with consultative support from KPCO, integrated a hunger screening question into the pediatric well-child questionnaire with an explicit focus on connecting members with community resources. Consultative support resulted in a safety net clinic in

Colorado adopting hunger as a vital sign and 91 percent of members being screened during clinic visits. In addition, KPCO awarded grants to other organizations in Colorado to increase food insecurity screening, link organizations to resources and help them understand best practices for connecting individuals to food resources.

Colorado has improved its ranking for SNAP participation from 50th in 2008 (the lowest participation) in the country to 45th in 2016. During that time members of the KPCO project team have actively participated with Hunger Free Colorado, advocating for statewide policies to increase access to federal nutrition programs and providing testimony on hunger as a health issue.

Partnerships between clinical institutions and community organizations are critical to meeting the social and behavioral needs of members and advocating for policy and system changes to end hunger.

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