



Fresh Food Farmacy

Fresh Food Farmacy (FFF) is the first major project of Geisinger’s new SpringBoard Health initiative, a radical new approach designed to transform the health of a community by addressing the socioeconomic determinants of health. FFF brings a “food-as-medicine” approach to communities designed to combat high rates of obesity, pre-diabetes and diabetes. An estimated one in three people in Lackawanna county are obese, while 12 percent have been diagnosed with diabetes.

The goal is to design and implement an intervention that can prevent disease and empower participants to manage their conditions through food-related behavior and lifestyle changes. The focus on healthy eating is critical. Research finds that a healthy diet and exercise can be just as important as medication in regulating blood sugar and preventing long-term complications from diabetes. However, many people lack access to healthy food or knowledge about a healthy diet. Economic challenges also play a role, with some families running out of food before the end of the month, or being forced to choose between buying food or buying medication.

Fresh Food Farmacy is designed to address these challenges.

By the numbers

- 1 in 3 people living in the US will develop diabetes in their lifetime
- 9 out of 10 cases of diabetes can be prevented with healthy lifestyles

Households that experience hunger on a regular basis (food insecure)



1 in 7 (14.2%) Lackawanna County



1 in 8 (12.3%) Pennsylvania



1 in 8 (12.3%) United States

Children who experience food insecurity

22%

Lackawanna County

20%

Pennsylvania

18%

United States

Residents with diabetes



1 in 7 (14.2%) Lackawanna County



1 in 9 (11.1%) Pennsylvania



1 in 11 (9.3%) United States

The goals

Fresh Food Farmacy is an innovative, sustainable program designed to address the health challenges faced by patients with diabetes and food insecurity. Its goals are to:

- Provide all residents with diabetes access to quality medical care, nutrition education, case management, and access to a clinical pharmacist. These interventions will help patients learn the skills they need to improve the management of the disease and make important lifestyle changes
- Ensure that people with diabetes and their families have access to at least 10 meals a week of fresh, healthy food
- Reduce the burden of diabetes in the community, including medical complications, prescription medication use and cost of care
- Educate students and community groups about the health effects of obesity and diabetes, and the benefits of healthy lifestyle habits on these conditions
- Connect local farmers with local food banks to provide fresh, locally grown food to community members who might not otherwise be able to afford it

The details

Geisinger will identify individuals with HbA1c levels greater than 8.0. They will receive a “prescription” from their primary care physician for fresh food and will be enrolled in the FFP. Geisinger will provide participants with clinical support including primary care services, nutritional consultations and diabetes self-management classes. For those patients who are food insecure, local food banks, such as the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, will provide healthy food to participants. The goal is to provide enough fresh food for at least one meal a day, five days per week, for the entire family.

Participants will also receive menu ideas for other meals so they can learn to prepare healthier meals on their own. The food bank, nutritional counseling and educational support will be located in the same space to avoid transportation issues.



Early results

The pilot stage of the FFF began in July 2016 in Northumberland County, Pa. Early data demonstrates improvements in blood sugar control and weight. In addition, most participants have begun exercising and report that they are more involved in managing their own health and the health of their families.

Perhaps the most profound findings are that several participants have been able to reduce or even eliminate their diabetes medications.

Next steps

SpringBoard Health and its partners are now ready to move from the pilot phase to fully implementing FFF in the Northumberland County area. We have chosen Scranton, a city of 76,000 people in Lackawanna County, to roll out the program community wide. Additional expansion sites are planned for Lewistown and Sunbury, with others set to be established when community resources reach a critical mass.

Through donor support and grants, as well as savings realized from the improved health of the community, we expect FFF will be self-sustaining within two years.

