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Healthy Food Access and Education

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Healthy Food Access

Providing resources and
educational materials to
families about healthy
foods

Milton Family Medicine,

Elizabeth Kelley MS3

Family Medicine, 2023

Project Mentor: Dr. Kim Hagemen



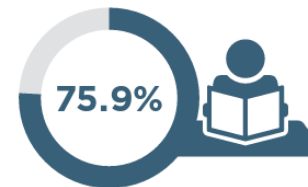
Public Health Impact of Food

➤ *Food and dietary habits have a lasting impact*

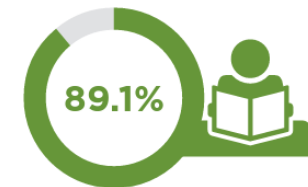
- Per the USDA, poor nutrition is the leading cause of illness in the United States, associated with more than half a million deaths per year. Not only is it linked to high mortality rates but there are significant co-morbidities including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Nutrition also has socioeconomic impacts including skyrocketing high health care costs, lower academic performance, increased financial stress and overall lower productivity.
- Certain populations are at higher risk of diet-related disease displaying some of the innate inequalities within our society. **Black and Indigenous children** are more likely to **experience obesity** than their white peers and those who **face food insecurity** are also at a higher risk.

Healthy diets for children is both important and very challenging

FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH ELIGIBILITY AND KINDERGARTEN READINESS



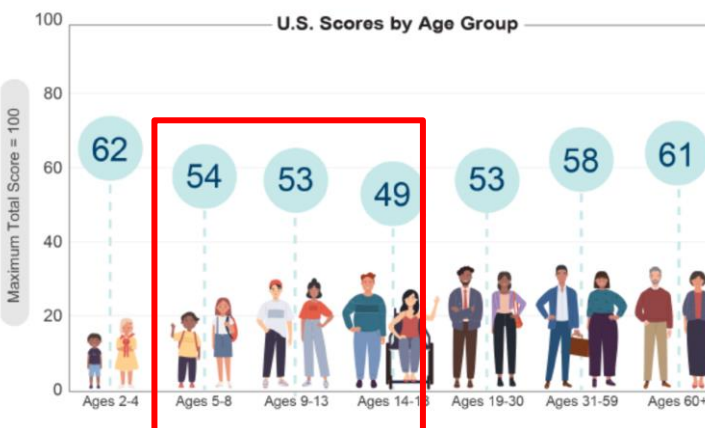
Students who do qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch are considered "kindergarten ready"



Students who do not qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch are considered "kindergarten ready"

SOURCE: Secondary Data¹⁷

Access to and affordability of healthy food is a **major social determinant of health** that has a large impact on developing kids with ramifications throughout the rest of their life



The USDA uses a Healthy Eating Score that indicates how well Americans diet aligns with the recommended federal dietary guidelines **and children ages 5-18** have some of the lowest scores (out of 100) of the entire American **population indicating they are the farthest from the recommended dietary guidelines**

Problem Identification

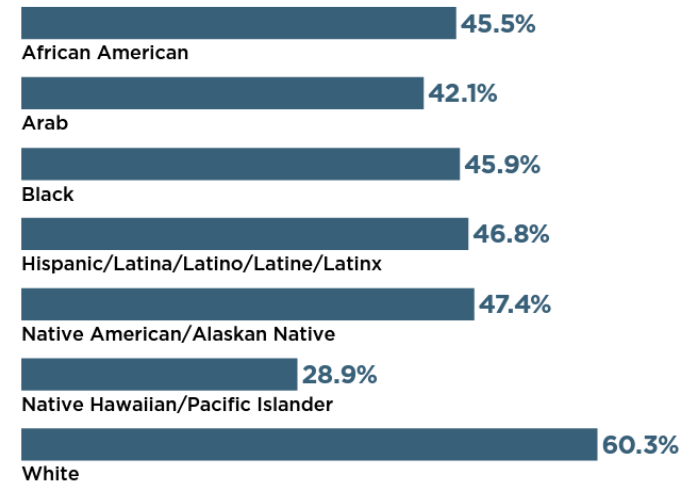
➤ *Food is an Important Social Determinant of Health in Vermont*

- Food insecurity is a rising problem within Vermont with Hunger Free Vermont estimating that the number of Vermonters experiencing hunger everyday rose from 10% to 33% in 2020
- For families experiencing food insecurity or lack of access to healthy foods, many dietary habits for children form based on available and affordable options. Many times, these foods are high in calories, have a low nutritional index and are highly processed
- Food habits are initiated at home and children become accustomed to eating the food types they're familiar with
- Without access to and education surrounding nutritious and culturally appropriate foods, Vermont youth are developing poor dietary habits that will have lasting impacts on their health

Vermonters note that access to food is a challenge

The CHNA Community Survey asked residents two questions about their ability to access foods they want to eat and their support for increasing places to buy healthy foods.

I CAN GET THE FOOD I WANT TO EAT IN MY COMMUNITY



1 in 3

respondents would like to “increase places to buy healthy foods”

- When broken down by race, less than half of residents identifying as African American, Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Arab, Native American/Alaskan Native, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander strongly agreed that they can get the foods they want to eat.

- From the most recent 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment of Chittenden County and Grand Isle, there was significant feedback that families would like improved access to culturally appropriate and healthy foods

Milton Community Input

Jacqueline Hoff

Food Service Coordinator, Milton High School

“Even if there are healthy options for students at lunch, by the time they get to High School students are choosing the foods they are more accustomed to eating at home. This is more along the lines of fried food options and higher calorie carbohydrates. This age group won’t eat a food they aren’t familiar with, and they don’t always understand the long-term consequences of their decisions. Building unhealthy habits now results in those habits for the rest of your life. If children are never exposed to healthy foods like vegetables, fruits healthy grains and protein then they won’t ever learn to incorporate them in their diets. It is a huge loss that we no longer have the Farm to School food educator who came into the schools and taught children about local, healthy food. She made it interesting and fun for kids to learn about the importance of healthy foods. Kids were excited to learn about gardening and vegetables.”

Registered Dietician Milton Family Practice

“In my experience, lasting behavior and dietary changes are not achieved through quick, non-specific dietary interventions. Providing information that is out of context for the patient/family likely won't be effective. Families need continual support and recommendations that are tailored to them. A lot of times, people are hesitant to work with an RD when they are food insecure because they think they will be told to purchase expensive and "exotic" foods in order to be healthy. For this reason, a lot of the initial work with the family is around rapport building, getting to know them and their situation so that recommendations fit in their lifestyle and budget.”

Ideal Intervention

- Food systems and dietary habits can be a hard intervention to tackle as they are not a one-time event. As mentioned by the community partners, food habits are developed over time and are heavily influenced by societal, cultural and familial dynamics. By expecting changes and habits to be a quick fix, it is an unrealistic expectation that is a disservice to patients.
- Socioeconomic factors have a huge impact on access to healthy foods and behaviors around food choices. Behaviors are many times developed in childhood, and families experiencing food insecurity can develop behaviors based on poor access to healthy food. Education and sustained early intervention are the best tools towards helping parents ensure their children develop health behaviors and a healthy relationship with food.



STEP 1: Dietary interventional counseling program for interested families surrounding access to healthy foods and ways to incorporate it into their life in affordable manners



STEP 2: Re-initiating the “Farm to school” intervention including education and exposure to healthy foods, gardening and farming practices to help educate children about food systems and health in a friendly and positive manner**

Realistic Intervention

- As wonderful as it would be to incorporate the other two interventions, those will take substantial time, effort and coordination that is currently not feasible
- This is a smaller intervention that is both applicable and possible to implement in the short term



Materials available in a dot phrase (or a handout) for providers to put in after visit summary or to be given to them at checkout containing information regarding local healthy food options, gardening options and ways to affordably incorporate healthy foods

Here are some options for healthy and affordable food in the community for your kids and your family! If you are interested in further counseling or would like additional help with access to healthy foods please let our office know as we have multiple ways to help!

Milton Family Community Center

23 Villemarie Lane
Milton, VT 05468-0619
802-893-1457

There are many options at the Community Center including an **Emergency Food Shelf** which is accessible by appointment only from 10am-2pm, Monday-Friday. Call 802-893-1457 to set up an appointment to stop in!

Food Access

[VeggieVanGo - A Fresh Food Program of the Vermont Foodbank \(vtfoodbank.org\)](#): Monthly access to and education surrounding healthy food options. Check out the list of options for distribution sites

[Food Access — Intervale Center](#): The Intervale Center has options for free local produce throughout the summer and winter

[Fair Share one-pager \(squarespace.com\)](#): Intervale Center summer and fall options for local farm produce

[Programs - Feeding Chittenden](#): Feeding Chittenden has a variety of options including a Food Shelf as well as Hot Meals and the Good Food Truck

Interested in getting more involved in gardening with your children?

The Milton Public Library has community garden plots that you can volunteer to help with or rent a plot for the summer to have access to and try growing your own garden!

If you want to learn some great skills, Vermont Garden Network has free gardening workshops available at the Intervale!

<https://vtgardens.org/garden-like-a-farmer-workshop-series-is-back/>

Healthy Food Options on a Budget

Trying to eat and cook healthy food for children on a budget can be difficult! There are some links below that offer some options on how to make this more doable for your family.

[VT Fresh - Vermont Foodbank \(vtfoodbank.org\)](#): VT Fresh recipes are [provided](#) simple ways to prepare healthy and delicious food

[Food Hero](#): Oregon State University's resource helps you learn how to shop for and prepare healthy, tasty meals for the whole family. Plus, there is content [just for kids!](#)

[Spend Smart. Eat Smart](#): This database, from Iowa State University, has tons of tips and recipes for how to eat healthy while sticking to a budget. Every recipe features the cost per serving.

[Hunger and Health](#): Feeding America's recipes feature ingredients that are commonly found at food banks. Most meals are simple and require little to no tools or equipment. And they are still budget-friendly and nutritious.

[WIC | Vermont Department of Health \(healthvermont.gov\)](#): Food Access for Women, Infants and Children - WIC

Results and Response Data

- Due to delayed implementation, adequate full scope response data was not collected at the clinic, but I did have conversations with both residents and providers on using the materials for their visits
- Clinicians tend to customize their dot phrases and therefore people said that they would reference the materials in the dot phrase and make a subset one for their own personal use
- Providers re-iterated similar sentiments that dietary changes are very complex and can take substantial counseling for impactful change to occur

Evaluation of Effectiveness

- Dot phrases are **helpful ways** to provide information to **patients and families** where they can access the information **easily and centrally**
 - They are **convenient** and **practical** ways for **physicians** to provide additional information and educate patients outside of the office visit setting
- Despite the **ease of implementation**, it is **unlikely** that these dot phrases will lead to **lasting change** in **dietary habits** unless these ideas are addressed multiple times and patients are willing to be counseled
 - To see if the information in the dot phrase was helpful an option would be to check-in with patients at follow up visits to see if any of the resources were used
- **Dietary changes and access to healthy food is hard** and patients require **support, education and counseling** on an **ongoing** basis
 - After talking with other providers and attending Grand Rounds presentations, **group visits with providers** are becoming more feasible. Group family dietary counseling could potentially be a great way to facilitate **healthy food discussion and education** in a sustainable and helpful way for the patients

Recommendation for Future Projects

- Focus on implementing group visits with providers for families that are interested in making dietary changes
- Group settings can be a conducive way for families to learn together, gain a support network and are efficient ways for providers to interact with families seeking similar support
- These visits could be both MD visits or RD visits pending on the interest level and focus of the visits
 - Options for future projects include:
 - Creating an enrollment form for families to fill out to get a baseline understanding of what they would like to get out of the sessions
 - Creating a Smartset template for providers to use for the sessions
 - Creating take home materials for the patients to have post-sessions
 - Creating an assessment form that allows patients to provide feedback on the sessions
 - Review funding options to re-institute the Farm-to-School program at Milton Schools

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Consent

- Verbally attained consent and attained through email