

Pre-Read for Measure X Funding Request

Executive Summary: In partnership with Contra Costa County Health Services (CCHS), the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano proposes to launch a Mobile Food Pharmacy to offer nutritious, medically-tailored food to at-risk individuals suffering from common health conditions associated with poor nutrition (such as diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia). Providing healthy food at no cost will result in improved health outcomes, lower healthcare costs, and help combat ongoing systemic inequalities that continue to cause harm in communities of color.

Community Need

The Food Bank's Mobile Food Pharmacy program will aim to improve the health of at-risk residents of Contra Costa County by addressing a root cause of negative health outcomes: food insecurity. Food insecurity can be described as without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Limited income individuals often turn to inexpensive food that is rich in calories but poor in nutrients. The challenge is often complicated by the lack of transportation, time, and resources to access healthy food, especially in "food desert" communities. Many vulnerable residents are battling health issues along with socially-determined poverty. Food insecurity and an unhealthy diet can have a detrimental impact on individuals, such as worsening of an illness or poor management of a chronic disease.

Communities of color in Contra Costa County and across the nation are more at risk of suffering from both food insecurity and chronic diseases related to poor nutrition. Compared to White, non-Hispanic individuals, Black Americans are more likely to experience higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, according to the US Office of Minority Health ([source](#)). In fact, the Office of Minority Health goes further to say African-Americans are twice as likely to die from diabetes ([source](#)) and 30% as likely to die of heart disease ([source](#)) as their White counterparts. Data from Feeding America reveal the Black community, "regardless of geography, age, or other characteristics, generally experience food insecurity at higher rates than whites" ([source](#)). In Contra Costa County, 19 of the 20 census tracts identified by Feeding America with the highest levels of poverty in 2018 have a majority of residents identifying as people of color. These trends have only been exacerbated by the onset of the pandemic and resulting economic crisis: Feeding America projects a 31% increase in the food insecurity rate in Contra Costa County from 2019 to 2021.

The effects and costs of managing a chronic disease are far reaching and can often lead to lost wages, especially for those in lower-paid positions who are less likely to have access to paid-sick days. Although California requires employers provide a certain amount of paid sick days for hours worked, an individual with a chronic disease can quickly run through this allotment, risking lost wages, missed payments, and falling into debt. In May 2020, the Bay Area Equity Atlas produced a report on essential workers in the Bay Area, finding they are "disproportionately low-income, Latinx, Black, Filipinx, women of color, and immigrants [who] face economic and social vulnerabilities" ([source](#)). These findings further underscore

the need for investment in targeted health interventions for communities of color in Contra Costa County if we are serious about improving the economic outcomes of those who have been historically marginalized.

Finally, preventable, diet-related diseases account for billions of dollars in healthcare costs each year in the United States. According to the CDC, “In 2017, the total estimated cost of diagnosed diabetes was \$327 billion in medical costs and lost productivity. Obesity costs the US health care system \$147 billion a year” ([source](#)). Feeding America has noted the well-documented correlation between healthcare costs and food insecurity, finding that “California has the highest overall healthcare cost associated with food insecurity at \$7.2 billion” ([source](#)). Individuals suffering from these chronic diseases also incur considerable expense over time, making it both a macro and micro-level burden on our society.

Currently, there is a gap in the support network for food insecure individuals currently suffering or at risk of suffering from nutrition-related chronic diseases in Contra Costa County. The Food Bank’s traditional programs provide nutritious food at no cost and CCHS provides medical care. A partnership between the two organizations will provide residents a more targeted, individualized approach to the issue of food insecurity and the frequently-resulting negative health outcomes.

Proposed Plan

The Mobile Food Pharmacy program will serve low-income individuals in Contra Costa County flagged by healthcare providers as food insecure and in a position to benefit from a targeted nutrition intervention in order to improve health outcomes. Currently the Food Bank operates distributions at four County Health Clinic sites for a total of 9 hours a week:

- Contra Costa Health Center in Martinez: 2nd and 4th Monday of the month from 12-1pm
- Antioch Health Center: 1st and 3rd Monday of the month from 10-11am
- Pittsburg Health Center: 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month from 1:30-3pm
- West County Health Center in San Pablo: 2nd and 4th Saturday of the month from 2-3pm

With the support of Measure X funds, the Food Bank would have sufficient resources launch a Mobile Food Pharmacy program in Contra Costa County by purchasing two dedicated distribution trucks and expanding hours of operation at clinic sites from 9 hours to 160 hours of service a month at the clinic. We would also add 2 additional clinic sites in Brentwood and North Richmond, further expanding our geographic reach and deepening our impact among County’s most vulnerable residents.

With more service hours and dedicated vehicles, to the Food Bank can launch a Mobile Food Pharmacy using the model of our award-winning program in Solano County. Through our existing partnership, County doctors screen for food insecurity and refer patients to the Food Bank for assistance (currently around 700 patients a month) at a later date. With the launch of a Mobile Food Pharmacy, clinicians can now connect the individuals they have screened with support services right outside the clinic’s door. The Food Bank will provide healthy food at no cost, relying on partner clinicians’ expertise to offer a personalized, targeted nutritional recommendations. By locating the trucks on-site, we have removed transportation obstacles and created a one-stop-shop for both diagnosis and treatment for food insecure

individuals. Clinicians will examine patients and write a “prescription” the individual can then bring to the truck and receive a box of healthy food at no cost. Based on the clinician’s recommendation, participants will receive boxes containing both medically-tailored shelf stable foods as well as fresh produce. All foods offered will be low in sodium and added sugar.

The dedicated vehicles will also serve as community resource hubs. Rotating staff will include a nutritionist, CalFresh Outreach specialist, and volunteer community resource navigators to offer clinic patients a suite of support services, which can be further built out over time.

When designing this program, we relied heavily on our learnings for the Mobile Food Pharmacy program in Solano County. Community feedback has included the recommendation of leveraging a Client Engagement Committee, which we will implement in Contra Costa County. We will also commit to undergo ongoing training and learning, focusing on specialized nutritional needs and addressing cultural sensitivities, all with an end-goal of improving client experience.

The Food Bank is thrilled to have found an enthusiastic partner in CCHS to launch this program, which will allow us to accelerate our collective impact and improve health outcomes for marginalized residents. By expanding our partnership with CCHS, the Food Bank is able to rely on the expertise of professionals and offer patients a personalized, targeted nutritional intervention. This program targets not only the short term needs of clients (food today) but also the long-term health concerns created by food insecurity. With an agile, Mobile Food Pharmacy, we can work to break the cycle of chronic health conditions in the low-income community.

Expected Outcomes

The Food Bank anticipates this program will have a number of positive, far-reaching outcomes in Contra Costa County. Lower healthcare costs, reduced food insecurity rates, and improved health outcomes for at-risk individuals are among the positive effects we expect to see in the long term. In Pennsylvania, Geisinger Health System, found their Food Farmacy program, “has had a greater impact on diabetes control (albeit in a small population) than expensive medications...We have also seen significant improvements in patients’ cholesterol, blood sugars, and triglycerides — improvements that can lower the chances of heart disease and other vascular complications” ([source](#)). The Food Bank also expects the Mobile Food Pharmacy program to have trickle-down effects including increased healthy food available to household members of participants, increased wages due to fewer missed days of work due to illness, and generally healthier, more productive communities that have suffered historically from poor economic and health outcomes. Contra Costa Health Services will track the individual metrics of patients, while the Food Bank will track participation rates and the type and amount of food distributed. This data will measure the impact of the program on patients’ health over time.

In the short term, we expect to see fewer missed health appointments and an improved diet among participants. The Food Bank has operated a smaller version of this program with funding from and in partnership with Solano County since 2018 with very encouraging results. According to Solano County Supervisor Erin Hannigan, “The Mobile Food Pharmacy was really an answer to food insecurity in our county. It helps folks who are living in food deserts and accessing our medical clinics to have access to healthy food and fresh produce.” Healthcare workers dedicated to improving the health of their clients

are happy to participate and grateful for the support they have received from the Food Bank in this effort. In Solano, many clinicians were excited to see their clinics as a "one-stop shop" and commented on how "this will help people keep their appointments!" Patients have responded positively as well, including Kim, a Solano County Mobile Food Pharmacy participant, who shared, "I can still kind of afford some groceries, but its helpful to get a few extras, too, especially if they're healthy."

Estimated Expense

In order to support expanded hours at clinics, we will need to dedicate two drivers and purchase two trucks, at an estimated cost of \$200,000 each (\$400,000 total). Based on current operating expenses for our Solano Mobile Food Pharmacy, we estimate program administration to be approximately \$400,000 a year, covering food costs, fuel, and staff time.

Organization Experience and Qualifications

The Food Bank is uniquely positioned to ensure the Mobile Food Pharmacy's success and efficient operation. For 46 years, the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano has fed the hungry. In 2012, we recognized that hunger is often accompanied by health issues due to the prevalence and low cost of unhealthy food and set a goal of produce making up 50% of food distributed. Despite having met the goal every year, our team does not feel we are reaching those most in need of healthy food: those suffering or at risk of chronic illness. By creating a county-wide partnership with clinics we will be able to rely on the expertise of professionals and offer patients a personalized, targeted nutritional intervention. This program targets not only the short term needs of clients (food today) but also the long-term health concerns created by food insecurity. With an agile, mobile, food pharmacy, we can work to break the cycle of chronic health conditions in the low-income community.

The Food Bank has a long history of successful partnerships in its work. In order to operate our programs as efficiently as possible, the Food Bank partners with innumerable organizations, including: Feeding America, California Association of Food Banks, Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services, Contra Costa WIC, Contra Costa County Health Care Services, John Muir Health, Kaiser Permanente and almost 300 partner food pantries.

The Food Bank has piloted an award-winning version of this program in Solano County. In 2019, the program was awarded the National Achievement Award for Health by the National Association of County Governments (NACo) National Achievement Award. "The launch of the Mobile Food Pharmacy is the first step towards the 'food as medicine' approach to show how food can help heal and prevent chronic diseases," said Erin Hannigan, District 1 Supervisor and Chairwoman of the Solano County Board of Supervisors.

Conclusion

Since the onset of the pandemic, the Food Bank has worked to adjust operations to meet the dramatic increase in community need. COVID-19 presented a complex crisis of increased demand, declines in donations of food, and disruptions to the charitable food assistance system's operating model, creating an economic crisis unlike anything since the Great Depression. Many of our distributions have seen a staggering increase of 50% in attendance and we are distributing an average of 62% more food year-over-

year in Contra Costa County (which translates to over 10 million additional pounds) to than before the pandemic. All of this has led to increased costs for the Food Bank and fewer resources available to launch innovative, systems-change work. Funding from Measure X will provide the significant infusion of funding needed to launch a Mobile Food Pharmacy in Contra Costa County and make meaningful progress in the effort to improve the health outcomes of our most at-risk neighbors.