

# HOLISTIC APPROACH TO FOSTER FOOD SECURITY & HEALTH

■ Alan Dallmann, Hunger Solutions Innovator

For the past four years, The Food Bank has assisted patients from Western Massachusetts health centers and hospitals through the Food Insecurity Screening and Referral Initiative (FISRI). This initiative was piloted in 2017 and initiated in January 2018, thanks to a three-year innovation grant from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts. FISRI is The Food Bank's way of partnering with health providers to connect residents to services to become more food secure and healthy. Although the initial referral for services addresses food insecurity, our staff also directs patients to other services that can bring them more economic stability.

Recent grants from Health New England, Baystate Health, and Mass General Brigham have enabled us to increase our capacity to assist more patients living with food insecurity and immediately provide them food vouchers and nutritious meals.

Providing healthy meals to meet the dietary restrictions of patients with chronic illnesses came about through a new Western Massachusetts Food Partnership we created to leverage existing meal delivery programs for seniors in the Pioneer Valley. Working with the federally-designated elder care organizations — WestMass ElderCare, Highland Valley Elder Services, LifePath, and Greater Springfield Senior Services — nutritious meals are delivered directly to income-eligible elders with chronic illnesses. Our partners also provide residents kitchen supplies to facilitate healthy cooking and eating. The Food Bank has a contract with MassHealth to provide these services.

Just as we promote consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables across all our Food Bank programs, FISRI assists patients to access fresh produce through the state-funded Healthy Incentive Program (see The Arc of Advocacy at The Food Bank article on page 16).

We also partner with Just Roots — a non-profit farm in Greenfield — to deliver boxes of fresh produce to participants. This summer, we will begin a similar partnership with Agric Organics in Hampden County.

Speaking of partnerships, we also work closely with the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts in Springfield to increase awareness of FISRI through an online referral platform called 413 Cares. This platform facilitates referrals from our health care partners for patients facing food insecurity as well as subsequent referrals from The Food Bank to other social service organizations that can provide housing, childcare, job training and many other services. This platform will strengthen the social service network serving Western Massachusetts residents.

Finally, we are working with the Greater Westfield Food Pantry to explore “non-health care” entryways to FISRI. We are beginning to assist individuals who already seek food assistance at this member food pantry by connecting them to more food and non-food resources using the same 413 Cares platform. We believe this pilot can be expanded across our regional emergency food network in the future.



Alan Dallmann



Johanna Farrell



Osvaldina Rodrigues



Damaris Arroyo

IN PARTNERSHIP,

FISRI Team