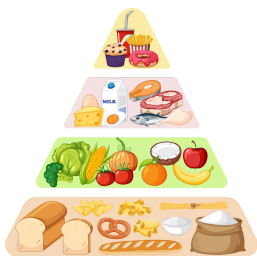


Addressing Food Insecurity in School-Based Health Centers: Practical Tips and Resources for Effective Interventions

Understanding & Identifying Food Insecurity in Students

What is Food Insecurity?

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the inability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.¹



Learn more



- [Household Food Security in the U.S](#)
- [Find your local rates of childhood food insecurity by state and county](#)

Importance of Addressing Food Insecurity in School-Based Health Centers



School-based health centers (SBHCs) can play a crucial role in identifying students who are food insecure, connecting them to resources, and implementing interventions that ensure no student goes hungry. This approach supports the health of individual students and fosters a healthier school environment, leading to better outcomes for all.

Learn more



- [Why SBHCs? Benefits to Addressing Food Insecurity through an SBHC – School-Based Health Alliance \(SBHA\) Toolkits](#)

Impact on Students



Food Insecurity affects millions of households with children each year.² Food insecurity can have a profound impact on children and adolescents. Research has shown that food insecurity has been linked to:³⁻⁴

- **Poor Quality Diet** resulting in conditions like iron deficiency anemia and other nutrient deficiencies.
- **Higher Risk of Chronic Disease** including issues like being underweight or overweight, slow growth, asthma, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and dental caries.
- **Poor Mental Health Outcomes** such as depression, anxiety, and stress affecting both parents and children.
- **Worse Educational Outcomes** including absenteeism and poor academic performance.
- **Increased Developmental Risk** such as developmental delay and behavioral and social-emotional problems.

Learn more



- [Food Insecurity and Health: Practices and Policies to Address Food Insecurity among Children - Academic Pediatrics \(academicpedsjnl.net\)](#)
- [Food Insecurity and the Social Drivers of Health – SBHA Toolkits](#)

Conduct a Needs Assessment

Before addressing food insecurity, your SBHC should assess both readiness and available resources:



- **Conduct Asset Mapping** to identify existing resources.
- **Involve youth** as key informants who can provide insight into the health conditions of their environment. Young people can assist with survey development, community data collection with peer-to-peer surveys, and dissemination of their findings.

Learn more



- [Readiness – SBHA Toolkits](#)
- [Youth Development Toolkit – School-Based Health Alliance](#)

Engage School & Community Partners

Partnerships are vital for the startup and long-term success of your program.



- **Students** are crucial partners in improving and expanding programming in SBHCs. Meaningful partnerships with youth will ensure your initiative goes beyond providing necessary resources and tokenistic engagement to actively develop students' personal and professional skills.
- **Empowering families and caregivers** involves more than just inviting them to participate—it means actively involving them in the decision-making processes that shape local programs. This could include forming family councils, advisory boards, or other mechanisms where their voices are central to the process.
- **Community partners** can include working with local food banks, pantries, and other community members to strengthen, sustain, and expand food programs, alleviating the burden on clinic staff.
- **School staff** including teachers, counselors, nurses, and social workers also learn about students who are experiencing food insecurity. Be sure to connect with your school community to better understand how they identify students, what partnerships they have in place, and how you can work together to address food insecurities.

Learn more



- [Sustainability – SBHA Toolkits](#)
- [No Kid Hungry | Best Practices: Starting a Family Council Toolkit](#)
- [Addressing-SIHE-Using-MTSS](#)

Select a Screening Tool & Modify Workflow



SBHCs can identify food insecurity by screening students. When planning screening practices:

- Select a validated tool to identify food insecurity.
- Build tools into existing resources and screening platforms.
- Plan for integration of screening practices in school-based health center workflows.
- Train staff to establish trust and rapport with students and families and practice having empathetic, sensitive, and culturally effective conversations when addressing food insecurity, as it is an intimate topic.⁵

Example Tools:

- **Bright Futures:** A comprehensive adolescent risk assessment tool, including food and food insecurity questions.
- **Hunger Vital Sign™:** A validated two-question tool widely used to assess food-related hardships in clinical settings.
- **RAAPS:** A screening tool designed for adolescents, including questions about food insecurity and related behaviors.
- **PRAPARE:** A comprehensive social determinants of health screening tool that includes questions related to food security.

Learn more



- [AAP Screen and Intervene Toolkit](#)
- [USDA ERS – Survey Tools](#)
- [Bright Futures \(aap.org\)](#)
- [Hunger Vital Sign](#)
- [RAAPS Screening Tool](#)
- [PRAPARE Toolkit | PRAPARE](#)

Best Practices & Considerations for Local Programs



Effective food insecurity interventions in School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) rely on consistent screening, strategic use of federal programs, and strong community connections.



Screening for food insecurity helps identify at-risk students early and ensures families are connected to essential community resources.

- Screen on a regular cadence for all patients consider once a year or at every visit.
- Normalize screening by framing questions to connect students and families with helpful resources and to clarify that food insecurity does not reflect neglect or poor parenting, thus reducing stigma.
- Identify students who present as food insecure.
- Regardless of the screening results, provide all students and families with a list of available community resources.

Learn more



- [Food Insecurity Screening – SBHA Toolkits](#)
- [Algorithm for Screening Youth](#)



Federal Nutrition Programs include but are not limited to:

- **The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP—formerly known as food stamps)** provides monthly food assistance via an Electronic Benefits Card (EBT) for eligible families to purchase food at stores and farmers' markets.
- **The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** offers nutrition education, healthy foods, breastfeeding support, and healthcare referrals for income-eligible pregnant/postpartum women, infants, and children up to age 5.
- **National School Lunch Program (NSLP) & School Breakfast Program (SBP)** offer free or reduced-price meals to eligible students in participating schools, meeting federal nutrition standards in exchange for United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) subsidies.
- **The Summer Food Service Program (SFSF)** is a USDA program that is federally funded, state-administered, and locally sponsored and allows children to access nutritious meals free of charge when school is out.

Learn more



- [SNAP Outreach in Schools Toolkit](#)
- [SNAP State Directory](#)
- [State Fact Sheets: Trends in WIC Coverage and Participation](#)
- [The School Breakfast Program](#)
- [Summer Meals | No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices](#)
- [Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit](#)



Referral to Federal Nutrition Programs – SBHCs can work with students of families not already enrolled in Federal Programs to:

- Inform families of programs and the health and educational benefits of participation.
- Ask all Medicaid beneficiaries if they are enrolled in SNAP. There are overlapping qualifiers for both programs, and families are often eligible for both, though more families are likely to enroll in Medicaid than SNAP.
- Facilitate enrollment in federal food programs by offering SNAP application assistance through community health workers, clinic navigators, and clinic/school social workers.
- Utilize resources such as mRelief to screen for eligibility and connect students and families to local assistance in the community.

Learn more



- [Federal Nutrition Program Referral – SBHA Toolkits](#)
- [FRAC/AAP Food Program Referral Chart](#)
- [mRelief](#)



Considerations for Local Programs:

- Explore connections to local resources for students from families already receiving federal support and those needing additional assistance:
 - **Food Pantries** provide access to non-perishable foods and fresh produce for supplementary food resources.
 - **Local Gardens** grow fresh produce and promote nutritional education.
 - **Backpack Programs** offer weekend or holiday food supplies.
- Connecting with Local Food Banks and leveraging community food programs for emergency food provision:
 - **Produce Rx Programs** prescribe fresh fruits and vegetables.
 - **Mobile Markets** bring healthy food directly to underserved areas.



Follow up:

- Confirm enrollment after referring students and families to federal nutrition programs.
- Identify barriers to enrollment and work with families to address challenges with the application process, documentation requirements, or understanding eligibility criteria.
- Provide continued support through additional resources, including connecting families with local community organizations. SNAP application assistance is often available through community organizations or local food banks.
- Reassess needs regularly by screening the needs of students to ensure they continue to receive appropriate support.



- [Lessons Learned – SBHA Toolkits \(sbh4all.org\)](https://sbh4all.org)
- [Interventions- Promising Models – SBHA Toolkits](#)
- [Feeding America \(food bank finder\)](#)

Monitoring and Evaluation

Key Metrics, Reporting, and Evaluation

To ensure the effectiveness of food insecurity interventions, it's crucial to monitor, evaluate, and refine them based on collected data. Regular evaluation strengthens your ability to report outcomes to stakeholders and funders and can adapt to meet student and community needs.



Evaluation and Key Metrics

- **Understand Program Reach and Prevalence** by measuring engagement with screening practices, level of need, referral, and use of federal and local programs.
- **Determine Resource Utilization** by monitoring the effectiveness of referrals to external food resources like SNAP, WIC, or local food banks. Follow up to confirm successful enrollment or use of referred programs.
- **Track Health and Education Outcomes** related to student health, including Body Mass Index (BMI) and school attendance. Do not expect these changes to happen quickly.

Reporting and Dissemination Methods

- **Develop Products** to highlight the success of interventions, supported by data.
- **Highlight User Voices** from students and families to complement the numbers and add a human element.
- **Share Impact with Partners** and those served by the school-based health center to advocate for continued or expanded support.

Engage in Continuous Quality Improvement

- Regularly collect and analyze data to assess the effectiveness of interventions and work as a team to identify small changes that could positively impact services.



- [Demonstrating Value and Impact – SBHA Toolkits](#)

Sustainability

Sustainability and Funding

Sustaining food insecurity interventions within SBHCs requires careful planning and ongoing support.

Building Strong Partnerships

- **Collaborate with Community Resources** to maintain a steady supply of food and resources.
- **Leverage Community Food Programs** like produce prescription or mobile markets to bridge gaps in food access.



Securing Funding and Resources

- **Diversify Funding Sources** by exploring grants, donations, and partnerships with local businesses.
- **Advocate for Ongoing Support** by communicating the success and impact of your interventions to funders and partners, using data-driven reports and success stories.



- [Sustainability – SBHA Toolkits](#)

References

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