

Multnomah County's Food-Focused Partnership with Zenger Farm

Recognizing that access to fresh vegetables is an issue that no amount of health behavior coach can fix, Multnomah County's primary care clinics decided to take on a project that would allow them to address their patients' challenges in this area.

One of the County's Program Coordinators was aware of a local urban farm, Zenger Farm, which has a focus working with those who are not well off. Through this alignment of interests, Multnomah County's Mid County Health Center partnered with Zenger Farm to implement a clinic-hosted CSA program to deliver a weekly box of Zenger Farm vegetables for 23 weeks, picked-up at the clinic by 25 low-income patient families who did not otherwise have adequate access to local veggies.



Lessons Learned

- Community Health Workers (CHWs) established a trusting rapport with many of the patients at the health center. Making a CHW the onsite point person for the pilot was the main reason recruitment was successful. It was successful because providers were able to refer patients to the CHWs instead of spending time to recruit.
- Another element crucial to the success of the work was the ongoing commitment of project partners. The implementation team at Mid County and representatives from Zenger Farm took a full year to develop their plan, which included mapping out a logic model. This led to a robust program, with supportive elements that included bilingual pick-up, newsletters and cooking classes, as well as farm tours, skill sheets and lots of 1:1 interaction between patients and staff. As this partnership grew to encompass Portland State University (to evaluate the program) and an advisor from the Knight Cancer Institute Community Partnership Program at Oregon Health & Science University, the group revisited but continued to stay true to the logic model.
- Financial resources were a big challenge. Zenger Farm successfully leveraged an Oregon Department of Agriculture's Specialty Crops Block Grant, which funded their staff time to assist in planning, coordinating, and implementing the project. Multnomah County also secured a grant through the Knight Cancer Institute Community Partnership Program at Oregon Health & Science University to help offset the cost of the CSA shares, since patients could not afford to pay full cost of the shares.
- The Mid County Health Center serves a very diverse patient population. Many more people were interested in joining than the program had resources to serve. This included language resources, CSA shares, and staff time on the part of all projects to administer the work. Another barrier that arose was the sharing of patient information. Ultimately, a workflow had to be put in place so that patients could share their contact information directly with Zenger Farm, thus ensuring that there were no HIPAA violations.
- Despite the challenges, CSA Partnerships for Health (the official name of the partnership), saw enough early success in the pilot year show that participants increased consumption of the recommended amount of vegetables per day as well as reporting better overall health. These learnings are being used to improve the program as it moves into its second year. This is one example of addressing social determinants of health to remove barriers to make healthy choices.

Challenges

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