

Food Security for Everyone: An Academy Priority



LAST MONTH, I WROTE ABOUT the ways the Academy and our members are addressing the worldwide problem of malnutrition. It's often a consequence of food insecurity—which is one of the Academy's highest priorities.

"Food insecurity is a systemic problem highly tied to many of the same factors that cause poverty," says Academy member Meg Bruening, PhD, MPH, RD, associate professor in the College of Health Solutions at Arizona State University (ASU). Much of her research is related to understanding and addressing food insecurity, particularly among youth. "Food insecurity doesn't always present itself in obvious ways," Bruening says.

OUR UNIQUE POSITION

Bruening also notes that food insecurity can be found anywhere. "We found very high rates of food insecurity among our own university's students—about 35%. As a result, I started a student coalition with leaders from nine student clubs across three of the four ASU campuses, representing over 200 student members. We then started the Pitchfork Pantry, a student-run food pantry, on two campuses, as a first step to address the emergency needs of our students. The president of ASU now has the ambitious goal of eliminating student hunger on our campuses by 2020."

Academy member Clancy Cash Harrison, MS, RDN, FAND, a TEDx and national keynote speaker and the president of the Al Beech West Side Food Pantry in Kingston, PA, says registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) are in a unique position to positively affect the food security of the people we work with.

"Every dietitian can use the Hunger Vital Sign (<http://childrenshealthwatch.org/public-policy/hunger-vital-sign/>) to screen everyone at all visits," Harrison says. Ask a patient or client how often these statements apply to them: "Within the past 12 months, we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more" and "Within

the past 12 months, the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more." An answer of "often true" or "sometimes true" to either question means a family with young children is at risk of food insecurity.

NEXT STEP: EDUCATION

"Once we know if a person has access to food, we can adapt the priority of nutrition education. It might have to start with introducing the patient to food assistance programs," Harrison says. "Dietitians will never know if our patient, client, reader, listener, employee, or student is food-insecure by looking at them. We must ask the right questions about food access."

Regardless of practice area, RDNs have the unique training to make positive contributions, in Bruening's words, "to the broader systemic solutions for food insecurity. For example, dietitians can volunteer to serve on food bank boards; participate in local, regional, and state food councils; and get involved in anti-hunger coalitions in their state."

Harrison adds: "Consider that food insecurity exists among the staff in your organization. You can work with your local food bank to start a monthly mobile food pantry for your worksite. RDNs who work in nonprofits can become a member agency for their local Feeding America food bank. If your organization is not a nonprofit, you can partner with a local food pantry to host their site."

RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Academy offers professional and consumer education opportunities in food security, and advocates for strategic priorities with legislatures and government agencies. The Academy Foundation offers educators an Insecurity/Food Banking Supervised Practice Concentration, developed as part of the Future of Food initiative with a team of educators and RDNs from the Feeding America Network (<https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica>).



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[org/resource/food-insecurityfood-banking-supervised-practice-concentration](https://eatright.org/resource/food-insecurityfood-banking-supervised-practice-concentration)). The Hunger and Environmental Nutrition dietetic practice group (<https://hendpg.org>) promotes "access to nourishing food and clean water provided by sustainable, secure food systems."

Our new Strategic Plan (www.eatrightpro.org/leadership/academy-policies/strategic-plan/what-is-the-academy-strategic-plan) includes a focus area on Food and Nutrition Security and Safety that includes these impact goals:

- increase equitable access to and utilization of safe nutritious food and water;
- advance sustainable nutrition and resilient food systems;
- leverage innovations in the reduction of food waste and loss; and
- champion legislation and regulations that increase food and nutrition security throughout the lifecycle.

Through 2025, the Academy will prioritize programs and initiatives that will significantly impact these areas and greatly assist families and communities. Let's work together, locally and globally, to help every person and family achieve greater food security.

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