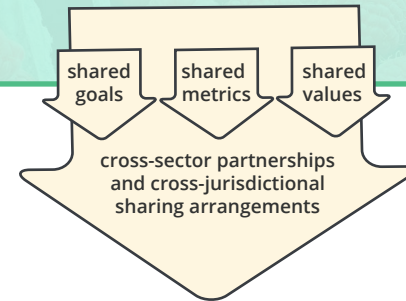


Improving Community Health Through Cross-Sector Partnerships:

Improving Food Security in Hood River



Cross-sector partners worked together to:

- ▶ Provide locally grown, healthful foods to individuals experiencing food insecurity
- ▶ Secure more than \$100,000 for a fresh fruits and vegetable voucher program
- ▶ Secure funding to staff a regional coalition of more than 35 organizations from two states.

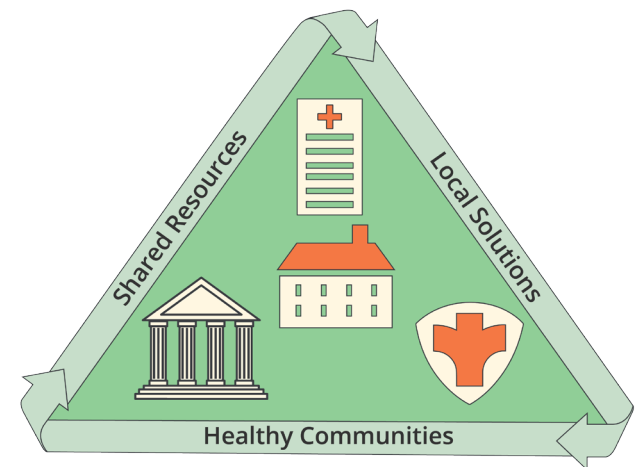
Background

Health starts—long before illness—in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, and jobs. Public health agencies in Oregon are collaborating with community partners to make communities healthier and ensure that people have access to critical prevention services. Community partnership development is a foundational capability for state and local public health agencies in Oregon and for many decades, local public health agencies throughout Oregon have demonstrated skill and dedication in forming cross-sector relationships with private,

public, and governmental organizations that share many of the same goals. **The purpose of this case study is to increase understanding of the effective formation and use of cross-sector partnerships to improve community health.**

The Project: Improving Food Security

In 2014, a coalition of stakeholders in Hood River produced a Community Health Needs Assessment that identified reducing food insecurity as one of the top needs in the community.



For more information: <http://cghealthcouncil.org/workgroups/bridges-to-health/>

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The Columbia Gorge Health Council* dove deeper into the issue of food insecurity with another survey: The Community Food Assessment results showed that one in three people in the Columbia River Gorge did not have enough food, and one in five people missed meals regularly. That means that at least 25,000 local residents experienced food insecurity.

Veggie Rx is a voucher program that makes fresh fruits and vegetables available to people who are experiencing food insecurity. First, health care and social service providers screen individuals for food insecurity. Providers then write a 'prescription' for those in need. Finally, patients or clients can 'fill' the prescription at farmers' markets in the summer months and grocery stores during the remainder of the year for fresh, whole fruits and vegetables.

Project Goals

Veggie Rx was one component of the broader community effort called Bridges to Health. The overall goal of Veggie Rx was to address food insecurity by giving those experiencing hunger greater access to locally grown and healthful food.

The Partnership

Convened by Oregon Solutions, a non-profit that provides grants and support for community-based projects, 33 organizations in the Columbia River Gorge region from Oregon and Washington signed a "Declaration of Cooperation." The declaration affirmed each organization's commitment to work together to solve community health problems and laid out what each agency could contribute to the collective effort. For example, Hood River County agreed to partner through SNAP matching funds, WIC classes specific to shopping at farmers markets, and screening health department clients for food insecurity.

One of the participating organizations, Gorge Grown Food Network, served as a backbone organization for the local coalition and secured funding from the Oregon Community Foundation for a position to staff the coalition. Gorge Grown Food Network also agreed to operate and seek funding for the Veggie Rx program. Multiple partners contributed funding for Veggie Rx, and more than \$100,000 was raised for an eight-month pilot starting in August 2015.

Partners that contributed funding included:

- ▶ Columbia Gorge Health Council,
- ▶ Providence Memorial Hospital,
- ▶ Mid-Columbia Medical Center,
- ▶ Washington State Farmers Market Association,
- ▶ Skyline Hospital,
- ▶ Hood River Rotary,
- ▶ One Community Health,
- ▶ and individual donations.

“I think one really neat component was that the hospitals who might otherwise be competing, saw it as a common mission to help address the hunger issue. So, Providence Memorial Hospital, Mid Columbia Medical Center, Skyline Hospital, Columbia Gorge Health Council, and a lot of other partners came together to contribute about \$100,000”

—Community-Based Organization Partner

**Note: Columbia Gorge Health Council (CGHC) is the community governing partner of PacificSource Community Solutions CCO. CGHC receives funds from PacificSource Community Solutions CCO to fund community projects.*

Food Security Convening Partners



Accomplishments

During the eight-month pilot program, the Veggie Rx initiative achieved several notable successes:

40 partners

40 partners across the Columbia River Gorge region worked together to increase food security through senior centers, the housing authority, Head Start, local public health departments, hospitals, and primary care providers;

2,200 individuals

Over 2,200 individuals were enrolled in the program; the highest rates of voucher distribution were through health departments.

33 vendors

33 stores, farm stands, and farmers markets began accepting Veggie Rx vouchers.

65-98% redemption

Redemption rates were between 65% and 98% depending on the clinic or distribution site; senior centers had the highest redemption rates.

Barriers + Success Factors

Food insecurity and hunger are complex problems requiring multifaceted, coordinated approaches. The coalition broke the issue down into three different needs: access to locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables, money for food, and knowledge and skills to prepare food. Through Bridges to Health, health care providers who issue food vouchers are encouraged to follow-up with patients and ensure a coordinated approach to addressing barriers to accessing food. Bridging communication between all of the clinics and hospitals participating in the voucher program and trying to get them all to work collaboratively was challenging, especially with respect to tracking and monitoring for evaluation purposes.

“We had the food banks involved, both the Oregon Food Bank and local food banks, a lot of social service agencies, and medical providers. We also had consumers that experienced hunger involved and some that had used the Veggie Rx program.”

—Community-Based Organization Partner

“The CCO and a number of partners did the Community Health Improvement Plan. At that time, food security was determined to be the top priority and a social determinant for health alongside housing. That was really huge in helping elevate the conversation here around how important food security is.”

—Community-Based Organization Partner

Lessons Learned

- ▶ The success of Veggie Rx is linked to the quality of the Community Health Needs Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan. The process for developing these guiding documents engaged multiple sectors and were informed by input shared by community members. As such, the Community Health Needs Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan are both valued, credible, and relevant road maps for improving community health.
- ▶ Engaging a convening organization like Oregon Solutions, and then handing off many of the organizational duties to a backbone agency, was integral in keeping partners engaged and programs moving forward.
- ▶ The project's success was grounded in the coalition's ability to address the goals of each partner organization. For example, the project addressed a governmental public health goal to address social determinants of health, a medical provider community goal to support patients in having healthful diets, and a local non-profit's goal to support use of locally produced foods.

Moving Forward

- ▶ An output of this collaboration is the development of a sustained food security coalition with 35 different partner organizations. The coalition has completed a planning process to identify regional priorities around local food hubs, increasing production, and providing better access through all of the channels that people utilize to buy food.
- ▶ The coalition is linked with all the partners working on Columbia Gorge food insecurity, and are able to direct people to resources such as a community garden, senior nutrition coupons, or a resource they may not otherwise know about.
- ▶ In a broader sense, this cross-sector collaboration between public health, a coordinated care organization (CCO), hospitals and other groups within the health care sector, and community-based organizations is working together on innovative solutions to community health needs.

“The Gorge is really ripe for a number of cross-sector projects that might come along because of this work. We’re now on our second collective community needs assessment, we’re going into our second community health improvement process, and it’s for our entire region, including the Washington State counties across the river.”

—Health Care Partner

“We’ve learned so much and we’re taking what we’ve learned to other collaborations. These partnerships helped us form a health equity coalition in the community. We’re able to build on some of the relationships that were formed during this project.”

—Public Health Partner



Rede Group would like to thank Hood River County Public Health, the Columbia Gorge Health Council, and Gorge Grown Food Network for their assistance with this case study.