



Open Discussion on Food Barriers: Key Points & Insights for Stark County

May 15, 2025



Public Health
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Addressing Food Barriers: A Community Discussion on Access and Solutions

As part of the Community Health Needs Assessment (CHA), the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) subcommittee – focused on reducing non-treatment barriers to behavioral health access – examined social barriers in greater depth. To support this effort, a survey was developed to assess the social barriers impacting Stark County residents. The survey was administered through organizations during the fall and winter of 2024.

The final report included detailed responses from 137 residents, all of whom were at least 18 years old and actively receiving services from one or more of the participating organizations. These organizations included Access Health Stark County, CommQuest, Aultman Generations, Stark County Health Department, Massillon City Health Department, and Alliance Family Health Center.

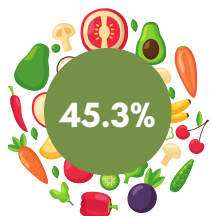
Food insecurity was noted as the second most important issue facing families in Stark County from this survey (with **Finances, money, bills in general** cited as number one and **Housing** as number three).

On May 15th, the Stark County Health Department hosted an open discussion on food barriers for the community to share information on programs and resources that work, identifying where services fall short, and brainstorming solutions.

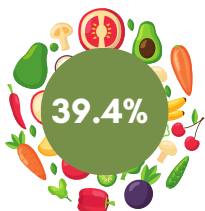
This report presents selected results from the Social Barriers Survey, along with key points and insights from the open discussion.



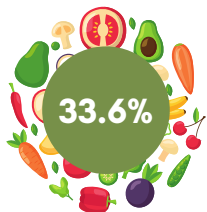
Social Barriers Survey Snapshot



RAN OUT OF FOOD BEFORE THEIR NEXT PAYCHECK



HAD TROUBLE GETTING ENOUGH FOOD



FOUND IT TOO DIFFICULT TO GET TO A GROCERY STORE



COULDN'T AFFORD TO EAT HEALTHY MEALS

What Would Help People Get Enough Food

(Top 4 Responses)

Affordable housing	39.4%
Affordable utilities (water, electric, phone)	35.0%
Being able to get around easier	32.8%
Having a grocery store nearby	19.0%

★ Around half of respondents reported that they received food stamps/EBT/SNAP (56.2%) or got help with food from food pantries (46.7%) while a quarter or more received help with food from friends or relatives (27.7%) or WIC (24.8%).

Q1: WHAT ARE YOU HEARING FROM CLIENTS? WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISSUES WITH FOOD ACCESS IN STARK COUNTY?

Benefits don't match the rising cost of food

High cost of healthy foods

Lack of ID, which is required under food pantry and USDA guidelines

Reduced or constrained funding impacting program delivery

Loss or reduction in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits

Fear of additional loss of funding

Lack of transportation to pick up food



Clients miss 211 resource

Zip code restrictions limit access to some pantries

Access to food pantries limited to once a week or month, which is not enough to provide sufficient food for the entire family

Discontinuation of various food programs

Limited delivery driver availability

Lack of variety of food that people can get from pantries
(limited meat, dairy, eggs, other staple items)

Q 2: WHAT RESOURCES ARE YOU USING?

Click the underlined text on this page to view more information

CATHOLIC CHARITIES

- Food Pantry
(once a month per family,
no ID required)

CHURCHES AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

- Food Pantries
- Weekend Programs

CLEVELAND CLINIC MERCY MEDICAL

- Pop-Up Grill Events
- Food Voucher

DISCOUNTED GROCERY STORES

- [Grocery Outlet Bargain Market](#)
- [Sommers Discount Market](#)
- [StarkFresh](#)

FEED KIDS FIRST

- School Pantry Program
(Program services 12
local schools)

LIBRARY

- Backpack Program
Children between the
ages of 3 and 17
Backpacks are available at:
 - Main Library
 - Madge Youtz Branch
 - DeHoff Memorial Branch

MASSILLON CITY SCHOOLS

- Summer Food Truck
(also includes fresh produce)

MASSILLON HEALTH DEPARTMENT

- Community Health Garden

OLDER ADULT FOOD DELIVERY PROGRAMS

- [Meals on Wheels](#)
- [Vantage Aging](#)
- [Direction Home Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities](#)

PERRY HELPING PERRY

- Food Pantry
- Sack Snacks

SALVATION ARMY

- Food Pantries
 - [Alliance](#)
 - [Canton](#)
 - [Massillon](#)

STARK COUNTY HUNGER TASKFORCE

- Food Pantries List
- Backpack Programs

OTHER

- [Strong Families, Strong Neighborhoods](#)

Q 3: WHAT WORKS? WHAT PROGRAMS OR SERVICES SEEM TO HELP?

Effective Community Food Strategies	
Choice Pantries	Limits food waste by letting clients choose what they need.
Pop-Up Pantries	Brings food to the underserved area temporarily.
Mobile Pantries	Allows for a greater reach to the community.
Proxy Pickup	Helpful for people facing carious challenges in accessing food.
Cooking Classes/Demos	Teaches clients how to prepare donated food.
Food Voucher Programs	Alliance Family Health provides vouchers–no client status required.
Community Gardens	• Downtown Canton Community Garden • EN-RICH-MENT Garden • Massillon Health Department • North Canton Community Garden • Plain Township • StarkFresh Please note: <i>This is not comprehensive and may not include all community gardens in the county.</i>
Meeting People Where They Are	Understanding personal and social barriers to access.
“Hand Up, Not Hand Out” Philosophy	Tackles root causes like transportation and employment.
Social Determinants of Health Screenings	These screenings are followed by direct support.



Q4: WHAT ARE THE GAPS IN SERVICE?

Food Waste and Misalignment with Client Needs

- Many food pantries distribute more food than families can use, resulting in waste.
- Clients often receive food items they are unfamiliar with or unable to prepare.

Limited and Inconsistent Access to Services

- Access to food support is often constrained by limits on pantry visits or by time-sensitive voucher programs.
- Some clients miss out due to unclear communication, limited availability, or transportation challenges.

Gaps in Community Awareness and Resource Coordination

- Many clients are unaware of available benefits through managed care plans or local resources.
- Community organizations often work in silos, leading to duplicated efforts or missed opportunities to fully support families.

Incomplete Referral and Follow- Up Processes

- Referrals to other agencies are frequently “open-looped, making it difficult to ensure the needs of the client have been met.

Root Causes of Insecurity Not Fully Addressed

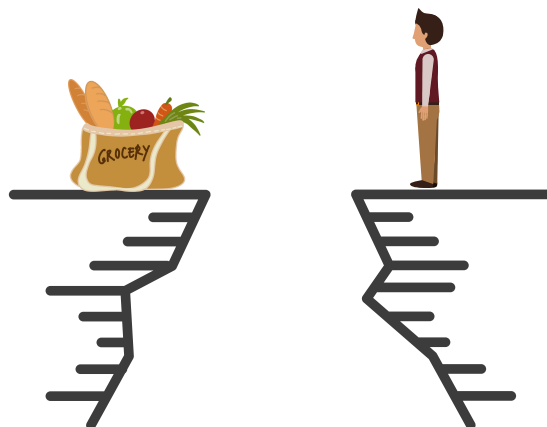
- Food programs often act as short-term fixes.

Special Populations Underserved

- Pantries often lack accommodations for those with dietary restrictions.
- Inconsistency in culturally appropriate foods.

Geographic and Economic Food Access Limitations

- Food deserts remain a concern, especially in areas where transportation is limited and local options are expensive, unhealthy, or unsustainable.



Q5. WHAT INNOVATIVE APPROACHES COULD BE DONE?

Integrate literacy development with food access through a combined program offering nutritious breakfasts and age-appropriate books to children

Dedicated transportation loops connecting directly to local farmers, butcher shops, and grocery stores to improve access to fresh food.

Incorporate extension programs and educational resources to local food pantries to help people learn about health eating and cooking.





RECOMMENDATIONS



Ohio State Extension Program to partner with food pantries to provide nutrition education.



Educate clients on additional MCO-managed care food services (through Medicaid providers like CareSource).



Ensure regular updates and cross-agency collaboration to keep StarkHelpCentral.com accurate.



Launch community awareness campaign.



Offer culturally relevant and special diet options. (e.g., diabetic-friendly, halal, gluten free)



Expand mobile markets or pop-up pantries in food desert areas.



Support the Social Information Exchange Network (to launch soon in Stark County) to help close loops on referrals for food support.



Connect food insecure individuals with local farmers and butchers for healthy and more affordable food.



Provide training on budgeting and meal planning and connections to job training programs to reduce reliance on food programs meant to fill temporary gaps.



AGENCIES PRESENT AT OPEN DISCUSSION MEETING

- Access Health Stark County
- AHEAD Inc.
- Alliance Area DV Shelter
- Aultman Hospital
- Canton City School District
- Catholic Charities
- Chasing Hope House
- City of Canton
- Cleveland Clinic Akron General
- Cleveland Clinic Mercy Medical
- CommQuest
- Community Beauty
- Direction Home
- Greater Stark County Urban League
- Massillon City School District
- Massillon City Health Department
- Meals on Wheels
- North Canton Pantry
- OSU Extension
- SCCA Headstart
- Stark County Community Action Agency
- Stark County Educational Services Center
- Stark County Health Department
- Stark County Community Foundation
- Stark County Family Council
- Stark County Hunger Taskforce
- Stark County Prosecutor's Office
- Stark Fresh
- Stark State
- StarkMHAR
- YMCA of Central Stark County





FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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