

Community Market Needs Assessment:

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Priority Issue: Food Insecurity and Nutrition Knowledge Deficit

The Community Market of East Alabama is a grocery store type resource for food insecure individuals in the Lee County area, and is supplied by local grocery stores and the Food Bank of East Alabama. This resource is useful for clients because they can come 5 times per year, and get an amount of food based on the amount of individuals and children in their households. They also have a brown bag program for seniors who are facing food insecurity, where volunteers pack a bag for the seniors and they pick it up each week. Food insecurity is a problem in the Lee County area and affects many individuals. Food insecurity is defined by “the condition of not having access to sufficient food, or food of an adequate quality, to meet one's basic needs”. Food insecurity could be caused by multiple issues or barriers in someone's life. This could be due to socioeconomic status, financial hardship, healthcare concerns, or any other burden that makes it difficult to obtain adequate food for oneself or family. Food insecurity could also be related to a nutrition knowledge deficit. A nutrition knowledge deficit is a lack of education and knowledge related to adequate food needs and knowledge around the nutrients in foods. From our literature review, we summarized the articles into abstracts and analyzed studies regarding nutrition related knowledge deficits around protein in older adults, health promotion behavior in those who are food insecure, and nutrition programs in older adults.

One of the articles we found entitled, “Low awareness of community dwelling older adults on the importance of dietary protein: new insights from four qualitative studies” summarized the importance of protein intake among the elderly population. The study found that the majority of elderly community members consume less than optimal protein, and believe they

are consuming more than they are. It is recommended that older adults consume 1-1.2g per kg body weight per day to prevent chronic disease. This information relates to the population that the Community Market of East Alabama serves, as many participants are of the elderly, low-income, and food insecure population. Though they have access to programs that provide for their need for food, many are still affected by a nutrition knowledge deficit, and consuming less than optimal protein for their well-being.

Another article we assessed called, “Attitudes and Knowledge Regarding Health Promoting Behaviour in Families Facing Food Insecurity” examined health behaviors and beliefs of families experiencing food insecurity. Studies have shown that individuals and families experiencing food insecurity are at higher risk for developing chronic disease. Many families experiencing food insecurity are, as expected, more worried about providing food for their family, than providing nutritious foods to promote a healthy life. Even when nutritious options are available, due to lack of education, they tend to choose sugary foods with little nutritional value. The study found that when families participated in programs that provided nutrition education, they were more likely to value and implement healthy behaviors for their families. With proper education, food insecure families have the resources available to make healthy choices to provide a more healthy life for themselves.

The last article we evaluated, entitled, “Position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior: Food and Nutrition Programs for Community-Residing Older Adults” explained that older adults are more likely to be hospitalized and need long term care as a result of poor nutrition choices. Increasing nutrition education as a component of programming that already exists to bridge the gap of food insecurity can help older adults avoid and manage chronic disease, and minimize the risk of food borne illness. If nutrition

education is implemented among this population, health care costs, among them, can be reduced, and lives can be lengthened.

Overall, The Community Market of East Alabama, benefiting low income families and older adults experiencing food insecurity, exhibits similar population and needs as in the studies we evaluated. The need for increased nutrition education to bridge the knowledge deficit and encourage shoppers to make choices that promote the health of them and their families is the biggest need at this community organization.

References

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