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Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition Receives State Funding to Continue Food Security Initiatives

Columbia, MD – The Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition (LHIC) has received a \$19,400 award from the Maryland Department of Health’s Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Control to implement activities aimed at addressing food security in Howard County identified by an LHIC committee during the first year of the project. The funds are in addition to those received in 2022 to support the establishment of the LHIC food security committee and the development of a work plan to address the needs of the community.

The goal of the committee is to “increase access to and awareness of culturally appropriate, accessible, affordable, and nutritious food to decrease food and nutrition insecurity among Howard County residents.”

“Access to nutritious foods is a social determinant of health and can have a significant impact on the well-being of our fellow community members,” said Howard County Health Officer Dr. Maura Rossman. “The work performed by this committee is critical to identifying the gaps that exist in our County. This committee also brings together stakeholders to collaborate on data-driven solutions to ensure everyone has fair and equitable access to the resources they need to provide healthy food for themselves and their families.”

“No one in our community should have to worry about keeping a roof over their head or food on the table,” said Howard County Executive Calvin Ball. “The LHIC works tirelessly to provide for every member of our community, and these grants will help ensure no one in our community goes hungry.”

The second year of this project will prioritize the implementation and completion of additional steps to improve food security in the County. Efforts that will be undertaken include:

- Analysis of a recently-completed food and nutrition survey with key partners to discuss the data and plan for addressing identified gaps.
- Implementation of a container garden pilot project in the Owen Brown Place community, with assistance from the University of Maryland Extension, to serve as a model for other communities.

- Design, translation, and distribution of an accessible brochure to increase awareness of existing food resources in the County.
- Utilization of GIS technology to develop an interactive map of food and other resources related to addressing the social determinants of health for residents to access via the LHIC website.

Nearly one in six county residents reported concern about running out of food before they could afford more, according to the [2021 Howard County Health Assessment Survey](#). Additionally, the survey found that 32% of residents reported eating vegetables less than once per day in the past week, highlighting the need for expanded awareness and education surrounding nutritious food access.

“Howard County is one of the wealthiest counties in Maryland, however, several of our fellow neighbors are currently struggling with hunger and food insecurity,” said Food Security Committee co-chair Razan Sahuri, Nutrition Educator with the Maryland SNAP-Ed Program at the University of Maryland Extension-Howard County. “According to data from Feeding America, approximately 24,620 Howard County residents are food insecure. Individuals with food insecurity are unable to meet their dietary needs for a healthful and fruitful life. These residents struggle with increased risks of anemia, mental health issues, insufficient nutrient intake and inferior general health. Our mission at the Food Security Committee is to reduce food insecurity and advance efforts toward nutrition security for the County’s residents.”

“The LHIC Food Security Committee provides a forum for data-driven collaboration between stakeholders working toward addressing and eliminating food insecurity,” said Food Security Committee co-chair Carrie Ross, Director of Food Bank Services for the Community Action Council of Howard County. “The current focus is to share information on County-wide services, create innovative ways to provide healthy food, and teach residents how to grow vegetables. This initiative is critical to ensure all partners are working effectively to guarantee a hunger-free Howard County. I am grateful to be a part of this changemaking team.”

The funding from the State of Maryland is in support of the State Partnership Improving Nutrition and Equity (SPINE) Program, a national project of the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD). NACDD, in collaboration with the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity (DNPAO), will support Maryland in leveraging cross-sector partnerships to improve sustainable and equitable access to affordable, safe and nutritious food across the lifespan.

For more about the Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition and information about how members of the public can get involved, visit www.hchlhic.org.