

Food Insecurity in McKean County

NUR 1451 Capstone: Professional Nursing

Shaniah Hudson, RN

History

Food insecurity is defined as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life¹

The 2020 projected child food insecurity rate for McKean county is 30.2%, a 9.2% increase from 2018.¹

The Covid-19 pandemic has made food insecurity even more prevalent, and children are the most affected.

The National School Lunch Program is an example of legislation already in place to address child hunger. This program provides children with two guaranteed meals during school time.²

Supporting Organizations

Congress is expected to push for a child nutrition reauthorization bill. The American Heart Association has recently started a petition to “make sure that [congress] puts children first by providing them the healthy foods they need to thrive and make sure that no child goes hungry.”³



American
Heart
Association®

Feeding America is a prime example of an organization whose entire mission is to feed those in need and to help them “build a path to a brighter, food-secure future.”⁴



Political Issue

Our government has programs like the National School Lunch Program, WIC and SNAP to make sure children are fed, however, food insecurity is still a prevalent problem, especially for those of low-income households in rural Pennsylvania.

Food insecure children are at an increased risk for undernutrition resulting in poor development and risk for adult diseases.⁷ These problems may be related to lack of nutrients and the stress of inconsistent food supply.

Developmental delays and behavioral and academic problems are associated with poor nutrition.⁵

This link between childhood nutrition and adult health is so prevalent that it has been termed the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease.⁷

Food pantries make the perfect setting for health promotion and education about nutrition because many low-income and/or food insecure families rely on them

Impact on People in Rural NW Pennsylvania

Those living in rural areas are more likely to experience food insecurity, especially those living in areas considered to food deserts.

Food insecurity can be a result of not being able to afford food, living in an area of few or low-quality food resources, or a combination of both

Healthcare access is already limited in rural PA.

Promoting better nutrition decreases the risk for diseases that may require specialized care.

My Proposal to Improve the Situation

I am proposing legislation that will require children who access food pantries, to take at least 2 healthy items from the food pantry and receive an educational pamphlet about nutrition.

Healthy items are those that are: high in nutrients essential to development (vitamins, minerals, proteins) and low in saturated and trans fats, added sugars and sodium.

The pamphlet will be written at a first grade level so that all children are able to comprehend.

Impact on Students and Professional Nurses

One of the main roles of nursing is to advocate for and to promote health.

Children are a vulnerable population that aren't always able to advocate for themselves.

Food insecure children tend to have a low diet quality and unfortunately dietary habits in childhood often persist into adulthood.⁸

By promoting healthy eating, we are building great health habits that will decrease the risk for disease.

Children will be able to begin to take autonomy over their own health.

Legislator

PA State Representative Martin Causer

Representative Causer is the state representative for McKean County. He has been in office since 2003 and has served on a number of committees, one of which being former chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee. In a meeting with him about possible legislation to address food insecurity, he made it clear that he is aware of the issue and that this topic has been a priority for him. He referred to this topic as a timely, and statewide issue. Representative Causer mentioned that food pantries receive funding through the Department of Agriculture. During the pandemic, children lost their chance at 2 nutritious meals from school, so they predominately relied on food pantries. Causer explained that these pantries have always struggled for resources, but during this time they needed emergency support for food to feed families.



References

¹The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity. (2020, October 30). Retrieved February 11, 2021, from https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Brief_Local%20Impact_10.2020_0.pdf

²<https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp>

³<https://act.yourethecure.org/UjbGU3Q>

⁴<https://www.feedingamerica.org/four-work>

⁵John, C. C., Black, M. M., & Nelson, C. A., 3rd (2017). Neurodevelopment: The Impact of Nutrition and Inflammation During Early to Middle Childhood in Low-Resource Settings. *Pediatrics*, 139(Suppl 1), S59–S71. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-2828H>

⁶Hoffman D. J. (2010). Early nutrition and adult health: Perspectives for international and community nutrition programs and policies. *Nutrition research and practice*, 4(6), 449–454. <https://doi.org/10.4162/nrp.2010.4.6.449>

⁷Wadhwa, P. D., Buss, C., Entringer, S., & Swanson, J. M. (2009). Developmental origins of health and disease: brief history of the approach and current focus on epigenetic mechanisms. *Seminars in reproductive medicine*, 27(5), 358–368. <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0029-1237424>

Landry, M. J., van den Berg, A. E., Asigbee, F. M., Vandyousefi, S., Ghaddar, R., & Davis, J. N. (2019). Child-Report of Food Insecurity Is Associated with Diet Quality in Children. *Nutrients*, 11(7), 1574.