

# Agency Highlight

## Northeast Valley Health Corporation



Northeast Valley Health Corporation  
a *californiahealth* center



### Addressing Food Insecurity at Northeast Valley Health Corporation (NEVHC)



*Champions for Change – Healthy Communities Initiative funded partner, Northeast Valley Health Corporation (NEVHC), was selected as one of three 2018 Innovation Award Winners for their work in addressing food insecurity through screening and connecting patients with organizations that provide local food and resource assistance.*

On July 9, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency hosted the 2018 Food Policy Forum and Innovation Recognition Ceremony, where presenters showcased best practices on implementing nutrition and food sustainability guidelines.

In an effort to reduce food insecurity, NEVHC has begun screening patients at one of their clinics located in Pacoima in order to offer assistance and resources. Patients are asked to answer 2 questions during Well Child Exam



*Monsi Portillo, Jessica King, Denise Torres, and Victor Solano of Northeast Valley Health Corporation.*

visits for children ages 12-17, and if they screen positive staff would then provide further guidance in acquiring local food and resource assistance. Clinic staff have been trained with talking points and directions to refer patients to a Registered Dietitian if needed, while also providing a Food RX Guide with information on local food banks/ pantries, recipes, local Champions for Change classes and resources for free groceries.

NEVHC currently operates 15 licensed Health Centers, 4 Dental Clinics, and 13 WIC Sites throughout the San Fernando & Santa Clarita Valleys. Once the Pacoima pilot is able to collect data and gather best practices, staff plans to explore additional opportunities to screen for food insecurity with other programs and sites, while also offering recurring produce swaps at partner sites.

Considering food insecurity is no easy feat to solve alone, NEVHC is currently working to coordinate many local resources to connect patients with organizations that provide support such as local food banks/ pantries, an internal Community Resource Help Line in case patients have questions or concerns, as well as an online platform known as One Degree which is a kind of “Yelp” service that provides resources based on one’s location. Referrals are also being made to SNAP-Ed classes (Champions for Change), grocery store tours, edible gardens, community assistance programs, DPSS workers, and community walking groups.



*Jessica King, Associate Director of Quality & Health Education at NEVHC with Dr. Tony Kuo, Director of Research & Evaluation in the Division of Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention at the LA County Department of Public Health.*

In 2017, NEVHC provided 239,132 health care visits for 74,608 patients. Of these patients, the vast majority (98%) have incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), 75% live below 100% of the FPL, 23% are uninsured and 86% are Latino. In order to understand the needs of the community and the organization, Focus groups and key informant interviews helped identify the resources and gaps in the community while patient were also surveyed on SDoH resources used at NEVHC Health Centers.

NEVHC is striving to create a healthier food environment by extending our services beyond the four walls of our health centers. Screening for food insecurity at our health centers and connecting patients to resources has made a significant impact in the health of our patients. Currently, 8 pediatric providers and their care teams have been implementing the screenings and referrals at our Pacoima and Valencia Health Centers.

Additionally, 4 community health workers are screening adults at our Pacoima, Sun Valley, and San Fernando Health Centers. Recently, Pedro, our nutritionist followed up with a patient who screened positive for food insecurity. He learned that the 13-year-old and her family recently immigrated to the US from Latin America. Everything is new to the family and they are struggling financially. The family is living with another family in a small apartment until they find another place to live. When Pedro called the family in March, he enrolled the mother in One Degree and referred her to food banks in their area and housing resources. Pedro followed up with the family in May and they are receiving free food from the food bank he referred them to and the children are receiving free meals from the school's summer meal program. The mother is hesitant to apply for housing assistance as she is afraid of putting her citizenship status at risk. Although housing continues to be an issue, food became one less thing they had to worry about. Pedro ~ "The family expressed gratitude towards this service and the mom sounded more hopeful from the first time I talked to her." Hearing our patients share their stories on ways our team has been of assistance is extremely rewarding and motivates us to continue to battle food insecurity in our community.