

## **OCFSN VEGGIE RX STRATEGIC PLAN**

### **THE “ISSUE” - OUR HEALTH**

The question of diet has been elevated from a personal issue to a public health crisis. In 1990, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that the highest obesity rate of a U.S. state was 15%. Then in 2005, they reported that almost the entire U.S. -- 45 out of 50 states -- now have obesity rates over 25% and the remaining five have obesity rates from 20-25%.

Countless studies report that being overweight or obese can lead to increased risk of developing chronic disease such as Type 2 diabetes, high blood cholesterol, hypertension and stroke, asthma, and cancer. In 2017, the Journal of the American Medical Association reported that 50% of all U.S. deaths resulting from heart disease, stroke, and Type 2 diabetes, were linked to poor diet. Obesity and being overweight is not only physically costly, but financially so; the National Center for Weight & Wellness at George Washington University estimates that obesity-related medical costs now total over \$300 billion annually.

Combined with rising rates of obesity and chronic diet-related disease, millions of Americans simply do not have enough to eat. As of 2016, the USDA reported that 41.2 million Americans live in food-insecure households, including 28.3 million adults and 12.9 million children. Among this data set, Oregon was ranked #14 of the top 15 states with statistically significantly higher household food-insecurity rates than the U.S. national average, from 2014-2016. Households with higher rates of food insecurity than the national average include those with children (17%), those with children headed by single women (32%) or men (22%), Black non-Hispanic households (23%) and Hispanic households (19%).

Local and community food systems advocates are motivated to tackle this challenge by promoting healthy food access across their communities. Studies demonstrate that a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables can lead to the prevention of chronic disease, and the improvement of such disease states. Food systems and health care professionals are in a unique position to link fresh foods with community public health programs in an effort to shift diets away from those rich in processed, high fat, and sugary foods and beverages.

### **OCFSN VEGGIE RX GROUP**

The Oregon Community Food Systems Network, a collaboration of 53 nonprofit organizations and public health allies dedicated to strengthening local and regional food systems across Oregon, is breaking ground by partnering with health care providers across the state of Oregon to launch “Veggie Rx” fruit and vegetable prescription programs. Veggie Rx programs are innovative partnerships between farms and food producers, sustainable food nonprofits, community health clinics, and health care providers. Within this model, health care providers offer “prescriptions” for fresh produce to patients to address their diet-related health concerns. These concerns include but are not limited to obesity, diabetes, and food insecurity. Some programs also offer nutrition counseling, cooking education, and promote physical activity alongside increased access to fresh and healthy food.

The OCFSN’s Veggie Rx working group is currently evaluating vegetable prescription programs across Oregon. This process entails evaluating which models deliver the most impact and improved health outcomes in the specific communities served, where program improvements can be made, and how to expand programs in years to come.

OCFSN is motivated to collect meaningful data, grow its policy and marketing efforts, and develop a robust strategic plan in order to most effectively demonstrate the effectiveness of fruit and vegetables as medicine that lead to improved health outcomes and reduced health care costs.

*The overarching vision for the working group is to broadly integrate vegetable prescription programs into Oregon's health care system, as a powerful tool for combating diet-related chronic disease, and food insecurity.*

## **OVERVIEW OF OREGON VEGGIE RX PROGRAMS**

***Veggie Rx programs have been in operating in Oregon since 2014. In 2018, over 3,000 patients are projected to be served in over 30 cities across the state, through 12 Veggie Rx programs.***

- Patients across the lifespan will be reached, ranging from youth to seniors.
- Targeted diet-related disease and general diseases include food insecurity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, hemophilia, and cancer.
- Patients will access fresh produce at their health clinic, farmers market, farm stand, or grocery store using SNAP and WIC benefits, cash, health clinic vouchers, farmers market tokens, and prescribed farm shares.
- Programs run from six weeks to year-round, with an average length of 20.5 weeks
- [Click here](#) to access a map of Oregon cities where 2018 Veggie Rx patients will be served.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN**

Vegetable prescription programs are gaining steam across the country, in various forms including programs similar to Oregon's Veggie Rx programs, food pharmacies and pantries, health care partnerships with grocery stores and food retailers, and integrating nutrition education into leading medical education programs. While research demonstrates a clear link between diet and chronic diet-related disease and reduced health care costs for participating patients, the use of food as medicine is not yet broadly integrated into mainstream health care as a primary care mechanism. As Veggie Rx programs continue to grow, there is room for improvement around data collection and evaluation demonstrating effectiveness and impact, leading to increased awareness, financial support, and sustainability.

## **ASSETS**

The OCFSN Veggie Rx group has identified the following assets and opportunities exist to grow Oregon's Veggie Rx programs:

1. **Strong Existing Partners:** Current program partners are interested and engaged in partnering on a repeat basis. There is a wealth of knowledge across Oregon Veggie Rx program managers and partners and a desire to grow this work.
2. **Strong Political Climate:** Oregon is a relatively progressive state when it comes to supporting preventative health care strategies across our communities. There is increased motivation from the state to reduce health care costs, particularly in the Medicaid program.

- 3. Successful Track Record of Strong Programs:** Current Veggie Rx programs reach increasing numbers of patients year after year. New programs are launching annually with strong anecdotal and patient feedback and promising program data.
- 4. Diversity of Programs Across Oregon:** Programs operate independently and feature varying patient access points, prescription subsidies, currencies, data collection, and program components, addressing unique community health needs.
- 5. Robust Working Group Membership:** There is a strong contingent of skilled nonprofit leaders, researchers, health care policy makers, and providers at the table, passionate and committed to growing this work across Oregon state.

## **CHALLENGES**

The OCFSN Veggie Rx group has identified the following challenges for expanding its programs across Oregon:

- 1. Funding:** Primary funding partners include Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs), mainstream health care providers and hospitals, and private foundations. Preliminary findings show that vegetable prescription programs lead to improved health outcomes, however, more funding is needed to stimulate additional collaborative evaluation.
- 2. Cohesive Evaluation Strategy and Metrics:** Program metrics are not consistent across programs as provider, patient, and program goals widely vary across the state. Consistent metrics demonstrating program impact (positive health outcomes and reduced health care costs) are key to program growth and sustainability.
- 3. Insufficient Program Awareness:** Program marketing is managed in an individual level and a strategic statewide approach for marketing and communications does not currently exist.

## **STRATEGIC VISION**

*The OCFSN Veggie Rx team supports produce prescription programs across multiple health systems, to improve diet-related disease and reduce food insecurity, promoting health and well-being across Oregon's communities.*

## **GOALS**

In order to achieve its strategic vision, the working group has identified several goals, in order of priority:

- 1. Establish Program Evaluation Strategy**
- 2. Develop Sustainable Growth & Funding Plan**
- 3. Develop Marketing & Communications Tools**
- 4. Systematize & Streamline Statewide Program Operations**
- 5. Engage in Research-Based Policy & Advocacy Activities**

## **ACTIVITIES**

The working group will achieve its strategic goals by focusing on the following suggested activities:

<b>GOAL</b>	<b>SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES</b>
<b>1. Establish Program Evaluation Strategy</b>	<p>Establish target data and evaluation metrics to affirm the effectiveness of current programs and lay the groundwork for launching future programs.</p> <p>Refine patient survey tools and approach to capture most beneficial data for program improvement and growth.</p> <p>Identify which research goals will garner future support including health outcomes, financial savings, etc.</p>
<b>2. Develop Sustainable Growth &amp; Funding Plan</b>	<p>Establish innovative and sustainable funding strategies and mechanisms.</p> <p>Explore best practices and approaches for fundraising sustainability from successful national Veggie Rx programs.</p> <p>Align program design with CCO incentive metrics to strengthen CCO funding pipeline.</p> <p>Evaluate opportunities to integrate Veggie Rx programs into other systems such as public health and social services including WIC, SNAP, VA, and senior services.</p>
<b>3. Develop Marketing &amp; Communications Tools</b>	<p>Develop program toolkit to promote Oregon programs, provide resources to interested food systems and health care partners, and cultivate fundraising opportunities.</p> <p>Develop marketing strategies to increase broad awareness of Veggie Rx program across multiple sectors.</p>

<p><b>4. Systematize &amp; Streamline Statewide Program Operations</b></p>	<p>Form strategic committees to focus on specific projects and tools to promoting Veggie Rx programs, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Program Management &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>● Advocacy/Policy</li> <li>● Marketing</li> <li>● Fundraising</li> </ul> <p>Establish best practices and approaches utilizing resources from national Veggie Rx programs.</p> <p>Create user/client journey map or service blueprint for each program to identify areas of program inefficiency, opportunities for process improvement across programs, and Oregon’s best practices.</p> <p>Explore feasibility of a “common currency” across programs.</p>
<p><b>5. Engage in Research-Based Policy &amp; Advocacy Activities</b></p>	<p>Track and identify mechanisms for working with public policy partners to further awareness and support of Veggie Rx programs including advocacy, campaigns, letters, and other forms of policy engagement.</p> <p><i>(Several members of the working group are working on a letter for the OHA in response for a call for input on CCO 2.0 to advocate for additional contracts supporting Veggie Rx programs starting in 2020).</i></p>

**TIMELINE**

The timeline for accomplishing these goals is from July 2018 through December 2022, which also aligns with the strategic plan for the larger OCFSN organization. Specific timing and planning for each activity will be determined following the adoption of the strategic plan and formulation of project committees, who will be responsible for developing project plans for their designated goals and activities.

**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Following adoption of the strategic plan, working group members will ideally organize into project committees to formulate plans to carry out specific components of the plan. Monthly working group calls may shift to a different schedule to accommodate project committee calls and work sessions.

**STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

The Veggie Rx working group recently formulated a strategic planning committee, which is open and welcoming of new members. The current committee is comprised of the following OCFSN members:

- ***Kaely Summers, Chair***  
Nutrition & Farmers Market Manager, Adelante Mujeres
- **Eecole Copen, RD**  
Sustainable Food Programs Coordinator, OHSU
- **Lauren Lubowicki**  
CSA Partnerships for Health Program Manager, Zenger Farm
- **Marielle Slater**  
Evaluation Consultant, High Desert Food and Farm Alliance
- **Dana Taylor**  
Independent Consultant