

“Children and elderly tend to be disproportionately impacted,” said Doug Michael, Chief Community Health & Grants Officer for Eastern Maine Healthcare Systems. His primary role at EMHS is to work with the system as a whole to make stronger partnerships in promoting community health, and he noted that food insecurity has been an issue of growing concern for those working in the health industry.



DOUG MICHAEL, chief community health & grants officer for Eastern Maine Healthcare Systems, where he works to make stronger partnerships in promoting community health, of which food insecurity has been an issue of growing concern.



“There’s a strong connection between food insecurity and causal medical issues such as asthma, obesity, depression, mental health, suicide, and the list goes on,” Michael said. “Children who are food insecure or hungry tend to have a problem learning in school. Older adults are more likely to be hospitalized and have longer stays [and are] more likely to be readmitted after being released from the hospital.”

The geography and rural nature of our state also makes providing access to food difficult, even in communities where there are food pantries.

“These issues are exacerbated in our rural communities ... [they] tend to be less diverse and less resilient to economic downturns, our wages are lower, we have older than average populations, more people living in low-income households, greater distances to travel for work, groceries and essential services, more geographic food deserts where access to healthy food options are limited,” Michael said. “All of these factors conspire to reduce access and availability of healthier foods in rural Maine communities. On the other hand, we have good reason to be hopeful.”

On all fronts, there have been improvements, particularly when it comes to various sectors — both public and private — working together to provide access to food in Maine.

EMHS continues to partner with other agencies to assure all community members have access to healthy food. Examples include:

- The Aroostook Medical Center in Presque Isle partners with the Aroostook Area Agency on Aging to provide more than 2,500 nutritious “Meals on Wheel” to older adults each year.
- Inland Hospital in Waterville partners with the Greater Waterville Area Food Bank and has helped purchase a van that delivers each month 15,000 pounds of food to those in need.
- Seabasticook Valley Healthcare in Pittsfield partners with Kohl’s Foundation and five area schools to support school-based gardens, growing produce for healthy snack programs and school cafeterias.
- Charles A Dean Memorial Hospital partners with the Greenville schools as part of the Backpack Program — part of a program of Feeding America that provides children who are

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