



2017 POLICY & ISSUE RESEARCH

Issue: Food Policy & Food Justice

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1. Provide an overview of this issue, including background information and history.

Health & Dietary Intake in Bridgeport

Fruit and vegetable consumption is frequently used as an indicator of a healthy diet. Adequate fruit and vegetable consumption has been linked to myriad health benefits including reduced risk for cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes, certain types of cancers, overweight and obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies.¹ Adequate fruit and vegetable consumption among youth is at least 1-2 cups of fruit and 2-3 cups of vegetables, although recommended amounts vary based on age, gender, and activity status.¹ Adults should consume at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

In Bridgeport, a community health assessment showed that only 33% of adults consume at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Median intake of fruits and vegetables among CT adolescents is 1.3 servings per day.² F/V consumption among Bridgeport children is likely even lower as Bridgeport is the poorest city in CT (Bridgeport MHI = \$39,822; CT MHI = \$69,519)³ with nearly 40% of Bridgeport children living below the Federal Poverty Level.³ National data indicate that youth from households with low socioeconomic status (SES) consume even fewer fruits and vegetables than their counterparts living in higher-SES households.⁴

Poor diets among Bridgeport adults and youth likely contribute to the significant overweight and obesity problem observed in Bridgeport. Specifically, over one-third (33%) of Bridgeport adults are obese and 61% are overweight/obese.⁵ Thirty percent of Head Start 2-4 year olds and 50% of K-8 school children are overweight/obese.⁵ The Bridgeport residents at greatest risk for obesity include those who live below the poverty level, are food insecure, and consume few fruits and vegetables.⁶

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity (i.e., being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food) is a significant issue in Bridgeport. A survey conducted by the Bridgeport Department of Health and Social Services found that in some neighborhoods, up to two-thirds of residents experience food insecurity.⁷ The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport's (CCGB) Hunger Outreach Network includes over 40 food pantries and meal programs which serve at approximately 15,000-20,000 unduplicated residents each month. A sample of 184 CCGB food pantry patrons were surveyed in 2016 (Cross-Denny, Greer, & McCabe, paper in progress). The results showed that in the prior 12 months, 67.1% of pantry users did not have enough money to buy food, 47.2% skipped a meal almost every month in the past 12 months, and often (36.9%) or sometimes (44.6%) could not afford to eat balanced meals. These findings

provide a glimpse of the food insecurity in Bridgeport.

Proximity to Healthy Food Options

While limited local data is available, the data that is available indicates that access to healthy food is also limited by the location of healthy food retailers. For example, the East End of Bridgeport has been identified as a food desert (i.e., an area without access to fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods). Bridgeport initiated a farmer's market program in 2009 to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to the various neighborhoods across Bridgeport. The Farmers Market Collaborative is working to increase awareness of the program.

The affordability of transportation ties into this issue as residents without health food retail nearby are required to spend money on gas, pay for the bus (\$2.00/ride), or pay for other transportation to get to neighborhoods with healthier food retail locations.

Cost of Healthy Food

Findings from the 2016 Community Health Assessment⁸ indicate that residents living in the Greater Bridgeport region perceive healthy food as unaffordable. In a Bridgeport community health assessment, 27% of parents reported running out of food or money to buy food in the previous month.⁶ In addition, overweight Bridgeport adults reported cost as the biggest barrier to eating healthy.⁶

"Food Mirages" is a relatively recent term in the food world. Food Mirages are areas where grocery stores exist but are too expensive for nearby residents to use. Thus, access to food isn't just about physical access but also about ensuring residents can afford to purchase healthy food if it exists nearby.

Limited Community Engagement

In the section below, we identify organizations that are working to address food challenges in Bridgeport. One issue that all of the organization deal with is limited community engagement. This is not to say that Bridgeport community members do not care about inequities that exist around food in Bridgeport. Rather, the organizations below have recognized a need for greater community involvement and feedback when developing programmatic and policy solutions. These organizations continually wrestle with the best way to foster this involvement.

- 2. What is the current state of this issue in Bridgeport and/or CT? How is it relevant to our community? Think about ways it aligns with BPTGN's mission, vision, and core values where possible.**

This issue aligns with our core values of **Diverse, Actionable, Inclusive, and Community**. It aligns with our mission to create a new cultural identity for Bridgeport. It aligns with our vision to generate effective action around issues that are important to our members and to our community.

- 3. Who else is working on this issue in Bridgeport and/or CT? Include groups on both sides of the issue.**

American Heart Association
CTCORE Organize-Now!
Connecticut Food Justice Network
Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport

Bridgeport's Farmers' Market Collaborative
Bridgeport Nutrition Center
FreshConnections
Get Healthy CT
Green Village Initiative
A Pinch of Salt/Urban Eats
Health Department Corner Store
Cook and Grow

4. What are ways people can engage in this issue and/or actions people can take?

Bridgeport's Food Policy Council (FPC) was created to integrate all agencies of the city in a common effort to improve the availability of safe and nutritious food at reasonable prices for all residents, particularly those in need. The FPC recently developed 2017 Food Policy Recommendations which will soon be posted on the Food Policy Council's homepage (<http://bridgeportct.gov/content/89019/95959/210592/default.aspx>).

How Can People Become Engaged?

Persons interested in engaging to address issues around food in Bridgeport have a number of opportunities to get involved. First, persons might consider attending Bridgeport Food Policy Meetings which are open to the public. These meetings take place on the 3rd Wednesday of every month from 6:00-7:30. The location rotates to encourage attendance from a variety of neighborhoods. The Food Policy web page can be visited to identify the location for an upcoming meeting.

In addition, those involved in both food justice and Bridgeport Generation Now will likely call for participation in advocacy activities. Please consider contributing to these activities when calls come out! Finally, persons might consider reaching out to some of the organizations listed in this document to see how they can help/volunteer their talents and services.

Conclusion

Limited access to healthy food is a significant issue in Bridgeport. Organizations across Bridgeport are working together to try to identify programmatic and policy solutions. Additional community member involvement and input is needed to ensure solutions are meaningful to, and appropriate for, Bridgeport community members.