

Healthcare Initiative Foundation Awards Grant for Healthy Food Access Program in Takoma Park and Long Branch

The Healthcare Initiative Foundation (HIF) has awarded a \$45,000 planning grant to Community Health and Empowerment through Education and Research (CHEER). HIF's mission is to support organizations that offer solutions to improve the quality and delivery of healthcare for residents of Montgomery County.

CHEER is the convener of Healthy Long Branch, a consortia of health care providers, social service providers and community groups in Takoma Park and Long Branch. Healthy Long Branch brings partners from multiple sectors, such as business, nonprofit, health care, housing and community groups, together to help everyone in the community achieve excellent health.

The grant will go toward developing the Healthy Food Access Prescription program for residents in the Takoma Park and Long Branch communities with chronic health conditions that can be improved upon through good nutrition.

In a recent major study, the Montgomery County's Food Council Food Access Working Group (FAWG) reported that Long Branch is a community of low access to healthy food. The conditions affecting many people in the community include the high cost of living and low wages, limited transportation, limited time to shop, and limited access to kitchen facilities. As a consequence, many residents are experiencing poor health outcomes and have the highest hospital utilization rates for uncontrolled diabetes in the county. Long Branch, however, is not a food desert as there are healthy food sources and available health and wellness resources. What is needed is a stronger and deeper network of relationships capable of overcoming the barriers that prevent people from using healthy food.

This program will be a community wide partnership with the Crossroads Community Food Network, which is building a healthier, more inclusive food system in Maryland's Takoma/Langley Crossroads, Washington Adventist Hospital, Community Clinic, Inc., and the Primary Care Coalition of Montgomery County. The Healthy Food Access Prescription planning grant will allow partners the opportunity to explore best practices and effective strategies for patients to improve and manage chronic medical conditions through good nutrition and healthy food access.

The Healthy Food Access Program being designed would have community health workers with relevant cultural and linguistic knowledge provide residents with fresh fruits and vegetables, health and cooking education, and support to help participants adopt and sustain healthy eating and living practices. Strong connections will be developed between the health providers, community health workers, and food providers to evaluate health outcomes and ensure access to healthy food.

The HIF grant complements the recent Trinity Health Transforming Communities Initiative award of \$500,000 per year for up to 5 years to Institute for Public Health Innovation, which supports policies, systems, and an environment that reduces obesity. Two of the targeted communities are Takoma Park and Long Branch.

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