

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



PRIORITIZING HEALTH EQUITY & FOOD SECURITY

Spotlight on Heart Disease



Feeding America is collaborating with the American Heart Association to raise awareness about cardiovascular disease and its connection to food and health equity. Together, we can help people facing hunger get the extra help they need to prevent or manage heart disease.

Cardiovascular disease affects 1 in 4 adults and is the leading cause of death among adults in the United States.¹ Commonly referred to as heart disease, it is the buildup of plaque in arteries that leads to heart attacks, strokes and peripheral vascular disease.

Factors that increase risk for heart disease include:²

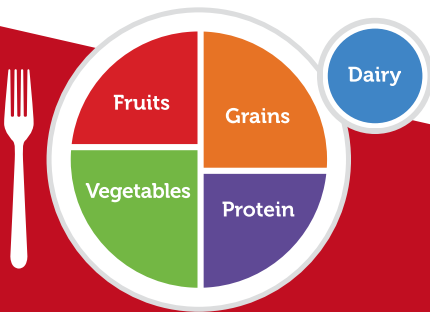
- High blood pressure
- High intake of saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars
- Diabetes
- Physical inactivity
- Smoking

In addition, individuals experiencing food insecurity have increased risk of developing heart disease.³ A nutritious diet is critical to maintaining optimal health and well-being. However, social, structural and systemic inequities have contributed to higher rates of hunger and heart disease for Black, Latino and Native American individuals.^{4,5}

To overcome these inequities, new approaches are needed to ensure that everyone has access to culturally appropriate healthy food, unbiased health care, and essential resources that improve overall health and well-being. Feeding America is focusing on solutions and supports that inform models of community health, free from injustices and inequities. This brief includes “real life” stories of progress.

Diet and Nutrition

A nutritious, well-balanced diet (click [here](#) for more information) helps prevent and manage heart disease. Community stakeholders, including food banks, food pantries, non-profits, public health and health care organizations can work together to support individuals in eating healthier. In 2019, Feeding America partnered with [Healthy Eating Research](#) to develop strategies and evidence-based nutrition guidelines to improve the nutritional quality of foods distributed within the charitable food system.



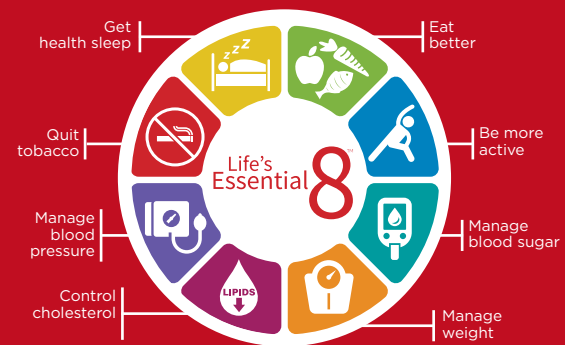
MyPlate.gov

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES	1/2 PLATE
WHOLE GRAINS	1/4 PLATE
FISH AND OTHER LEAN PROTEINS	1/4 PLATE
LOW FAT OR FAT-FREE DAIRY	3 CUPS

- Food low in saturated and trans fats
- Low sodium and no-salt added options
- Low sugar and no-sugar added options

FAST STATS Heart Disease

- High blood pressure impacts over 122 million people: nearly 1 of every 2 adults.¹
- #1 cause of death among adults in the US is heart disease.¹
- Black Americans were 30% more likely to die from heart disease than non-Hispanic white individuals in 2019.⁶
- Structural barriers such as reduced access to nutritious foods and quality health care are contributing factors to higher rates of heart disease (and adverse outcomes) among communities of color.^{4,5}



Life's Essential 8 are the key measures for improving and maintaining cardiovascular health, as defined by the American Heart Association. Better cardiovascular health helps lower the risk for heart disease, stroke and other major health problems. Addressing these key measures can be more challenging for communities experiencing systemic and structural inequities. Feeding America, American Heart Association, and other partner agencies can work together to address barriers to meet Life's Essential 8 to improve cardiovascular health.

Source: Lloyd-Jones, Donald, MD, ScM, FAHA, Chair, et al. Life's Essential 8: Updating and Enhancing the American Heart Association's Construct of Cardiovascular Health: A Presidential Advisory From the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2022;146(5):e18-e43. doi:10.1161/CIR.0000000000001078.

Stories from the Field

Friedens Food Pantries and the American Heart Association have a common belief that access to nutritious food is fundamental to health. It has benefits for both today — satisfying hunger — and the future — establishing a foundation for chronic disease prevention and control. Over the past several years, Friedens, a Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin partner, has worked with the AHA to support a variety of efforts that contribute to the overall health and well-being of the community. When the AHA led the charge to create a Fresh Food Access Fund in Milwaukee, Friedens Food Pantries was a key stakeholder in that effort. In spring 2020, Friedens was one of the recipients of that fund, with plans to utilize their allocation to build a community room at one of their locations. That space is used to educate their neighbors on healthy food and nutrition. It also allows room for health resources like blood pressure monitoring, providing more opportunity for efforts like the AHA's Check, Change, Control that were previously conducted with support from dietetics students at a local university.



TACKLING FOOD INSECURITY TOGETHER



“Support from the Fresh Food Access Fund is allowing Friedens to go beyond simple emergency food provision by helping us create a safe, welcoming space for community members to learn healthy food habits together, ultimately making a lasting change for health outcomes in Milwaukee.”

— Sophia Torrijos,
Executive Director at Friedens Food Pantries

Take Action! Addressing Heart Disease, Hunger and Equity in Your Community



CONVENE food, hospitality, education, social service, and other community partners to identify and develop solutions to hunger and health barriers within the community.



PRIORITIZE increasing access to affordable food, health care and medication; addressing the social determinants of health; eliminating health disparities; and amplifying community voice.



BUILD TRUST through positive interactions and communication with the community and engage in developing strategies to address unique and complex needs of people facing hunger, eliminating bias, recognizing we are all in this together.



DESIGN culturally appropriate resources; and make accessible in local clinics, grocery stores, food banks and pantries, community centers, schools and places of worship.



ADVOCATE for policy, systems and environmental change approaches that support increased nutritious food access, improved health and well-being for community members in greatest need.

¹Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics—2023 Update: A Report From the American Heart Association. doi: [10.1161/CIR.0000000000001123](https://doi.org/10.1161/CIR.0000000000001123)

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Heart Disease and Stroke. Published February 6, 2024. Accessed April 14, 2024. www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/factsheets/heart-disease-stroke.htm

³Vercammen KA, Moran AJ, McClain AC, Thorndike AN, Fulay AP, Rimm EB. Food Security and 10-Year Cardiovascular Disease Risk Among U.S. Adults. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2019;56(5):689-697. doi: [10.1016/j.amepre.2018.11.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2018.11.016)

⁴Javed Z, Haisum Maqsood M, Yahya T, et al. Race, Racism, and Cardiovascular Health: Applying a Social Determinants of Health Framework to Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Cardiovascular Disease. *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*. 2022;15(1):e007917. doi: [10.1161/CIRCOUTCOMES.121.007917](https://doi.org/10.1161/CIRCOUTCOMES.121.007917)

⁵Zierath R, Claggett B, Hall ME, et al. Measures of Food Inadequacy and Cardiovascular Disease Risk in Black Individuals in the US From the Jackson Heart Study. *JAMA Network Open*. 2023;6(1):e2252055. doi: [10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.52055](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.52055)

⁶Kyalwazi AN, Loccoh EC, Brewer LC, et al. Disparities in Cardiovascular Mortality Between Black and White Adults in the United States, 1999 to 2019. *Circulation*. 2022;146(3):211-228. doi: [10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.122.060199](https://doi.org/10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.122.060199)



American Heart Association and Feeding America are proud to collaborate to support a common interest in promoting equitable nutrition access and health equity for all.



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