

# PEDIATRIC FOOD INSECURITY SCREENING PARTNERSHIP



# FEEDING ALABAMA

Feeding Alabama was founded in 2010 and works to end hunger by assisting the food bank network in obtaining more food and funds, fostering public awareness of the food banks' mission, and creating partnerships to help alleviate hunger in Alabama.

We work to help align the efforts of Alabama's eight food banks to ensure food and funds are serving needs throughout our great state. Our work throughout the state to address policy and programs related to hunger has been recognized by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), and Feeding America. Our office has provided policy briefings to local, state, and federal elected officials on the nature of food insecurity in Alabama.

Feeding Alabama plays an integral role in the fight to end hunger in Alabama. ALFBA serves as a founding member of Gov. Kay Ivey's End Child Hunger in Alabama Taskforce, we are a proud member of the Feeding America Network, and our organization founded the first summer meals program in Florence, Auburn, and Tuscaloosa, Alabama. During our three years as a summer meals sponsor, we have provided more than 125,000 meals to over 3,000 children.

Whether or not your family is suffering from food insecurity, it's a problem that affects you. Alabama's future depends on our ability to produce a well-prepared and educated workforce to attract more companies to our state. That future workforce is our kids! But, while 1 in 5 children don't have enough to eat, they're literally fighting against the effects of hunger to learn and progress in school.

# PARTNERSHIP

"We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more." That simple statement is one that will create change in how Alabama addresses childhood hunger. Feeding Alabama, in partnership with the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, is working to reduce childhood hunger and its negative health effects.

The Pediatric Food Insecurity Screen Pilot Program will be introduced to Alabama Pediatricians in May 2023 at their annual state conference and executed following the event. The program will equip pediatricians throughout the state to adequately and easily screen babies and young children for food insecurity and connect their families with sustainable federal and community-based food resources and nutrition assistance programs.

Research has shown that children are often not identified as food insecure until they enter the public school system. Children who are food insecure are at greater risk of poor health, hospitalizations and developmental delays. This program will allow children in Alabama to be identified from the start, four to five years sooner than entering the school system in most cases.

Feeding Alabama will provide the attached screening kit to participating pediatric offices, along with screening toolkits (see sample attached). These toolkits will be printed with a QR code that will grant food-insecure families with access to valuable federal and local resources and nutrition assistance programs.

## 1 IN 5 CHILDREN IN ALABAMA ARE FOOD INSECURE

The USDA defines food insecurity (FI) as a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. For your patients, being food insecure means they do not have access to the foods they need for a healthy, active life.

### ACTIONS FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS: SCREEN AND REFER

Screening for FI is appropriate and warranted in the clinical setting, especially in environments where a significant percentage of the patient population has been identified as low-income. FI screening can be fast and incorporated as a standardized protocol into existing patient intake procedures. Because food insecurity is often cyclical in nature, with alternating periods of food access and food scarcity, screening should be included as a standardized component of care during all patient visits.

Screening can be conducted verbally with patients, or patients can respond to written questionnaires. Experience from other food bank-healthcare partnerships has shown that administering a short, two-item screening in writing receives the most honest responses from patients. Adding the questions to regular check-in documents or asking patients to answer the two written questions after they are in the exam room while waiting for the clinician does not disrupt workflows or require intensive engagement by staff. Screening results can then be communicated to clinicians prior to patient interactions so they can be discussed directly with the patient as part of the visit.

### FOOD INSECURITY SCREENER

For each statement, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for your household in the last 12 months.

1. "We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more." Was that often true, sometimes true or never true for your household in the last 12 months?
2. "The food that we bought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for your household in the last 12 months?

A response of 'often true' or 'sometimes true' to either question = positive screen for FI.

### IMPLEMENTATION

- Include the FI screening questions as part of written patient registration or intake forms
- Routinely screen every patient at every visit
- Include any positive screen notes for review and discussion by patient's PCP, social worker or other health care provider as part of the visit; identify and train a clinical staff person to provide support resources
- Train all clinical staff to take note of a positive screen and conduct a clinical assessment of health-related consequences of FI during patient visit
- Provide patient with Feeding Alabama nutrition resources and toolkit.
- Consider referrals and other clinical needs (dietitian, social worker, mental health, vitamin supplementation)
- Use existing documentation processes and Electronic Health Records systems to track referrals and individual and aggregate clinic data. ICD10 code Z659 can be used to indicate that a food insecurity screen has been completed; the ICD10 code Z59.4 can be used to indicate a positive screen for food insecurity

# Sample Toolkit Items



Each item in the toolkit would be branded 'Feeding Alabama' with a QR code to resources including:

- Referral information to existing programs and food pantries
- Connection to SNAP, WIC and other food programs

