

Executive Summary

To have sufficient food access means having “access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.”¹ In San Jose, a city of both great wealth and great poverty, 30% of all households are living below the self-sufficiency standard, the income level at which an individual or family can afford to meet their basic needs.²

Two groups disproportionately affected by poverty and food insecurity are individuals that are homeless and low-income seniors. According to the 2015 City of San Jose Homeless Census and Survey, on any given night, there are 4,063 individuals that are homeless in San Jose, and 2,810 of them are unsheltered.³ Of adults over 65 in San Jose, 29,755, or 27%, are low-income, meaning they earn less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.⁴ This report analyzes the gaps in healthy food access among these two populations and identifies opportunities to expand and improve food assistance in San Jose.

Individuals that are Homeless

There are over 4,000 individuals in San Jose that are homeless, with over 2,800 individuals unsheltered. For many, securing a consistent and healthy source of food is a daily burden, costing time and resources that could otherwise be spent taking care of their basic needs.

The City’s approach to homelessness recognizes that in addition to housing, providing the full range of supports and services leads to better outcomes for individuals, and to lower public costs. This approach requires close

1 USDA definition. “USDA ERS Food Security in the U.S.” USDA ERS Food Security in the U.S. September 8, 2015. Accessed December 16, 2015. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/foodnutritionassistance/foodsecurityinthe-us.aspx>.

2 “Healthy Food within Reach: Helping Bay Area Residents Find, Afford, and Choose Healthy Food.” February 2015. Accessed December 16, 2015. www.spur.org

3 Applied Survey Research. “San Jose 2015 Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey.” 2015. Accessed December 16, 2015. <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/44727>.

4 U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 20082012 5Year Estimates, Table B19037 <<http://factfinder2.census.gov>>.

coordination between nonprofits, the City, and the County to ensure that individuals, whether chronically homeless or experiencing a period of housing instability, receive the support they need.

This report underlines the importance of making access to healthy food an integral part of this coordinated response to homelessness. Using a variety of methods, including GIS mapping, interviews with providers, Census data, and local data sets, it identifies significant gaps in healthy food access and opportunities for the City and County agencies, The Health Trust, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders to provide services more cost-effectively.

This assessment is intended to be used as a guide on important questions of resource allocation and coordination in the City’s response to homelessness. Since the analysis portion of this assessment was completed, data from the 2015 Homeless Census have become available, showing that the population of homeless individuals has decreased and spread out to areas beyond downtown San Jose. These developments reinforce the following findings:

FINDINGS:

- Providers noted that food safety-net resources are scarce outside of downtown San Jose, and mapping of these sites confirms this. The location and number of homeless safety net providers does not consistently match with where individuals that are homeless are located. There is the strongest alignment of population and resources within downtown. In several Census tracts outside of downtown San Jose, individuals that are homeless have no access to a food safety-net provider.
- Providers expressed that an overall lack of coordination between providers makes it difficult to align resources with the population in areas outside of downtown.

- Only 14 of 42 food safety-net providers report serving congregate meals, despite the fact that they are the primary source of food for individuals that are homeless. Providers noted that many congregate meal sites are “overwhelmed” with clients that are homeless or living in poverty. If all individuals that are homeless received 1 meal 5 times a week, it would require 20,315 meals. Congregate meal providers serve approximately 8,598 meals per week, leaving a gap of 11,717 meals.
- Not all recently housed individuals have adequate access to food safety-net providers. This report presents opportunities to integrate food into the necessary supports and services provided to recently housed individuals.
- In many parts of San Jose, individuals that are homeless have very low access to transit to and from service providers, shelters, and healthy food retail. Access to public transit-- measured by the number of transit stops within a half-mile of safety-net providers and shelters-- is very low for all but one site outside of the downtown area.
- Many providers noted the need for a “centralized area” that could make it easier for individuals that are homeless to receive various forms of assistance. The maps show that individuals that are homeless in San Jose most likely do not have access to the full range of services they need within walking distance.
- The retail food environment within walking distance of safety-net providers and shelters provides few healthy food options. Measured with the Modified Retail Food Environment Index (mRFEI), the majority of the 42 safety-net provider sites and 44 shelters have moderately low to no healthy food access within walking distance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Integrate food access into City and County homeless support services.**
2. **Develop a food assistance protocol to assist those most affected by, or most at risk of nutrition-related chronic conditions.**

3. **Create a flexible congregate meal system for individuals that are homeless that can move as the population moves.**
4. **Formalize partnerships with faith-based communities to meet the needs of individuals that are homeless in areas of the city that lack food resources.**
5. **Explore opportunities to increase and use Senior Nutrition Program funding to better meet the needs of older adults that are homeless.**
6. **Explore opportunities to increase CalFresh enrollment of individuals that are homeless.**
7. **Develop infrastructure that supports an ongoing, coordinated solution to the food access needs of individuals that are homeless.**
8. **Explore opportunities in the existing safety-net infrastructure for cross-population services (e.g., could kitchens at Senior Nutrition Program sites prepare to-go meals for individuals that are homeless).**
9. **Form partnerships where possible between food safety-net providers and other service providers.**

Low-Income Seniors

Building healthy communities is one of the central themes of Envision 2040, the City’s General Plan. The document that sets the tone for future planning and development in San Jose recognizes that equitable access to healthy food is an opportunity to promote social cohesion, spur economic development, and contribute to a safer and healthier built environment. By addressing the food access concerns of one of the City’s most vulnerable populations, the City has the opportunity to invest in building stronger, healthier neighborhoods.

This investment is also a timely one; the percentage of residents over 65 in San Jose is expected to more than double by 2060. Planning for the needs of seniors, then, is planning for the City’s future. Currently, there are approximately 29,755 low-income seniors in San Jose, many of whom experience food insecurity. The forms of food assistance available to them include CalFresh/SNAP, Senior Nutrition Program congregate meals, brown bag and food pantry sites, and Meals On Wheels, a home delivered meal service for homebound seniors.

Using GIS mapping, interviews with providers, and analysis of Census data, this assessment identified a number of missed opportunities for investment in the current food assistance environment in San Jose with potential returns for the City, low-income seniors, and their neighborhoods. The findings presented here are intended to guide the City, County, The Health Trust, and other non-profit partners in future decision making on how to allocate limited resources and where to focus their efforts to support the health and well-being of low-income seniors in San Jose.

FINDINGS

- The location and number of senior safety-net providers does not consistently match with where low-income seniors are located. There is the strongest alignment of population and resources within downtown. In several Census tracts outside of downtown San Jose, seniors-- including many with ambulatory difficulty-- have no access to a safety-net provider.
- Twenty-two percent of seniors in San Jose have ambulatory difficulty. Low-income seniors with limited mobility may not be able to travel to reach Senior Nutrition Program congregate meal sites or brown bag sites, especially outside of downtown San Jose, increasing their risk of food insecurity and social isolation.
- Transit access within walking distance of many Senior Nutrition Program congregate meal sites is limited. The lack of transportation may prevent some low-income seniors from attending congregate meals, depriving them of adequate food and nutrition and the opportunity for social interaction.
- The majority of the City's planned growth areas, where many low-income seniors reside, contain very few healthy food options and an overabundance of unhealthy food outlets and liquor stores, which can encourage unhealthy food choices and serve as potential centers of crime.
- Many of the City's affordable housing units, of which 22% are "senior units," are generally located in areas with low access to healthy foods and an overabundance of unhealthy food options.

- The number of seniors served by Meals On Wheels is small compared to the number of low-income seniors with ambulatory difficulty and living alone in San Jose. Both the number and location of seniors with ambulatory difficulty in San Jose strongly suggest that the population in need of delivered meals is currently underserved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Identify senior communities, affordable housing units, and other residential areas with high concentrations of seniors that would benefit from cost-effective solutions such as food drops or mobile produce units.**
- 2. Develop a Senior Nutrition Program outreach strategy to increase participation in communities with high concentrations of low-income seniors and SNP congregate meal sites with the potential to increase capacity.**
- 3. Increase funding for mobile meal services, i.e., Meals On Wheels, for the lowest-income, most vulnerable older adults in San Jose.**
- 4. Explore innovative solutions to allow low-income seniors to access food resources in the community (e.g., restaurant vouchers, grocery delivery service).**
- 5. Incentivize healthy food retail in the City's planned growth areas.**
- 6. Explore opportunities in the existing safety-net infrastructure for cross-population services (e.g., could kitchens at Senior Nutrition Program sites prepare to-go meals for individuals that are homeless).**
- 7. Explore opportunities to increase CalFresh enrollment of low-income seniors.**
- 8. Form partnerships where possible between food safety-net providers and other service providers.**