

Veggie Rx Toolkit



PennState Health



REACH



PennState
College of Medicine

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Welcome & Executive Summary

Overview

This toolkit is designed to orient and support community partners for Penn State Health and Penn State College of Medicine's Veggie Rx program, a produce voucher program for communities facing chronic health conditions like cardiovascular disease and diabetes. This document will be particularly helpful for health systems, community organizations, federally qualified health centers, and other entities that are interested in running a produce voucher and nutrition education program under the leadership of one of Pennsylvania's largest academic health systems.



How to Use This Document

While some Veggie Rx protocols are prescribed by Penn State Health and Penn State College of Medicine, others are left to the discretion of our partners, always with support from our faculty, staff, and clinicians. If you are a prospective Veggie Rx partner, use this document to familiarize yourself with the program and to gauge whether Veggie Rx is a good fit for your organization. Community partners who have already agreed to collaborate with Penn State on Veggie Rx should use this document to establish a practical foundation for your program. While this toolkit is comprehensive, we encourage you to remain in close contact with Penn State Health's Office of Community Health as you consider Veggie Rx, and, hopefully, begin your own journey with the program.

Stay in Touch

Above all, this toolkit is meant to serve the needs of community partners like you. If you have any questions about Veggie Rx, please reach out to: communityhealthprogramming@pennstatehealth.psu.edu



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Authors and Contributors



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Ashley Visco, MSW, LCSW, is the former community health director for Penn State Health (PSH), where she led community health initiatives. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, Ashley worked to establish and run Penn State's Drive-Thru COVID Testing Clinic and mobilized Penn State's efforts to provide COVID vaccinations to marginalized and hard-to-reach populations. Long passionate about food access, Ashley also led the health system's work around food security and nutrition, supporting over 80 food access points across the PSH service area. She also served on the boards of the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank and Caring Cupboard in Palmyra, Pennsylvania.

Amber Coleman, MA, MBA, joined Penn State Health as the director of community health in March 2025.



Andrea Murray, MPH

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Andrea Murray, MPH, was a project director for the Department of Medicine at Penn State's College of Medicine. With an educational background and extensive training in nutrition and public health, Andrea is interested in how food insecurity and access affect social determinants of health as well as outcomes in rural health and racial and ethnic minority health. Andrea also served as the project director for Penn State's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) project, where she led collaborative partnerships focused on improving health outcomes in Berks, Dauphin, Lebanon, and York counties.

Laurie Crawford, MPM

Program Manager, Community Garden Initiative, Penn State Health
Program Manager, Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH), Penn State College of Medicine



Laurie Crawford is the program manager for the Penn State Health Community Garden and Food Access Initiative with the Rite Aid Healthy Futures Grant. In this role, Laurie builds collaborative relationships in communities with low food access and identifies partners for community gardens. With REACH, Laurie helps to coordinate community programs related to nutrition, physical activity, and community-clinical linkages. Beyond Penn State, she serves on the boards of the Community Health Council of Lebanon County, the Lebanon Valley Bicycle Coalition, YMCA Camp Rocky Creek, and 10,000 Friends of PA.

Emilie Woods, CHES®

Community Health Manager,
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Emilie is the manager for Community Health at PSH. In her role, she coordinates community health improvement programs and initiatives while overseeing onsite community health events. Emilie also leads the United Way Contact to Care Community Health Worker Program, based out of PSH. Prior to her current role, Emilie was a community health educator responsible for designing, implementing, and evaluating various public health initiatives.

Matt Cramer

MPH Student Intern,
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Matt is a project intern for the Office of Community Health and the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) project. In this role, Matt assists with writing and editing projects for the health system's signature food access and nutrition programming. Matt also works full-time as a writer/editor for Penn State's Division of Development and Alumni Relations. Matt stays active in the local community as an instructor at various yoga studios throughout the region.

The Veggie Rx team at Penn State Health and Penn State College of Medicine also includes Dr. Susan Veldheer, Monica Rush, Madeline Bermudez, Erika Mollo, Kayla Rutt, Fernanda Cuadro, and Dr. Christina Scartozzi.

Making it Happen

Veggie Rx is a collaborative effort across **Penn State Health** and **Penn State College of Medicine**.



PennState Health

Office of Community Health

Penn State Health's Office of Community Health is committed to improving health outcomes across Penn State's defined service area, which encompasses six Pennsylvania counties: Berks, Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, and Perry. Key to our success is the triennial Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), which both satisfies the requirements of the Affordable Care Act and helps to direct our short- and long-term community health strategies, including programs like Veggie Rx. With partnership from neighboring hospitals and community experts, we develop implementation plans to address critical issues identified in the CHNA, including mental health, health equity, and wellness and disease prevention. Penn State Health Community Health is a critical driver in executing the collaborative relationships and programming that have defined Veggie Rx's success.

To learn more about Community Health at Penn State Health, visit:
pennstatehealth.org/community.



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at Penn State College of Medicine

REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health) is a national program administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes. In 2018, Penn State College of Medicine was awarded REACH funds to work with residents of Lebanon and Berks counties, and in 2023, the program was funded for a second five-year cycle, which will add Dauphin and York counties to the population served. For more than five years, REACH has engaged community members to plan and implement culturally appropriate, evidence-based strategies to prevent chronic disease, promote healthy behavior, and address the root causes of racial and ethnic health disparities. Our work centers around building community partnerships to identify needs, assets, and opportunities in three areas: physical activity, nutrition, and diabetes prevention. All the while, we empower our partners to build healthier communities, one solution at a time.



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To learn more about REACH
at Penn State College of Medicine,
visit: reachberkslebanon.com.

Program Overview



Through produce vouchers and educational programming, **Veggie Rx** is making a difference in the lives of community members with chronic conditions.

Established in 2018 by Penn State Health St. Joseph Medical Center in Reading, Pennsylvania, Veggie Rx is a food and vegetable prescription program providing vouchers for fresh produce to patients with chronic health concerns like diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Clinicians at partner sites prescribe qualifying patients vouchers for fruits and vegetables, which may be redeemed at participating local farmers markets and grocery stores. While enrolled in the program, participants also receive nutrition education and ongoing counsel on healthy behavior.

By nature of its design, Veggie Rx sustainably supports both individual well-being and local economic development—and the program is one of Penn State's most powerful mechanisms to address disparities in nutrition, food access, and diabetes prevention in our service area.

Executing Veggie Rx is a collaborative process, and the support of Penn State Health and the College of Medicine is never out of reach. We look forward to working with you to decide the best way to deliver this program and to discover how we can help along the way.

How it Works

An overview of the Veggie Rx program

1

Conduct a Community Needs Assessment & Resource Inventory

Determine your community's level of need and your organization's capacity to build partnerships and execute Veggie Rx. See our next section (page 14) for details.

2

Sign on for Veggie Rx

Get started by reaching out to Penn State Health Community Health at communityhealthprogramming@pennstatehealth.psu.edu to start a conversation about launching Veggie Rx. Our team will help to kickstart your program with the resources, expertise, and orientation needed to achieve your goals.

3

Recruit Vendors

Establish relationships and agreements with local, accessible produce vendors who are willing to accept Veggie Rx vouchers, which will be reimbursed by Veggie Rx program funds.

4

Market Your Program & Enroll Participants

Complete outreach through digital and print media and educate staff members and clinicians on enrollment criteria like biometric collection to begin building your program base. As you market Veggie Rx and enroll participants, consider the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of your target population, tailoring print and digital communication strategies to meet the needs of your community.

5

Review Educational Curriculum & Prepare Lesson Materials

Prepare for the educational component of your program by reviewing the Veggie Rx curriculum, which will be provided to you by our project staff. From there, assess your participant population's educational needs and learning preferences to develop individual lesson materials on topics like healthy eating, physical activity, and mental wellness in advance of your program launch.

6

Run the Veggie Rx Program at Your Site

Conduct pre- and post-program surveys, host educational sessions, distribute vouchers, and regularly monitor progress by checking in with participants and partners.

7

Evaluate Your Success

Recollect biometrics and survey your participants to gauge program effectiveness.

Establishing Veggie Rx at Your Site



Is VeggieRx right for you?

We want to bring **Veggie Rx** to your community. Before becoming a partner, however, we suggest assessing your organizational capacity and community readiness for a fruit and vegetable prescription program.

Consider the Questions Below Before Diving in

<p>Is there a demonstrable need for greater food access and nutritional education among patients with chronic conditions in your community?</p> <p>Reference your local nonprofit hospital or health system's Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) and other publicly available data sources to determine your community's need level.</p>	Yes/No
<p>Does your organization have the personnel and time needed to implement Veggie Rx?</p> <p>While each organization will develop its own approach, a common set of positions—like a dedicated Veggie Rx nutritionist, health educator, or program coordinator—often help to facilitate success at our partner sites. Any staff members engaged with Veggie Rx should be allotted sufficient time for program activities. Occasional evening and weekend availability is especially helpful for reaching program participants with full-time jobs.</p>	Yes/No
<p>Are there local produce vendors or grocery stores who may be willing to accept Veggie Rx produce vouchers?</p> <p>Are you aware of local vendors who have already participated or may be willing to participate in a voucher program like Veggie Rx? Consider small and local businesses that are likely to be enthusiastic about promoting health in their surrounding communities.</p>	Yes/No
<p>Does your site have the space needed to host Veggie Rx education sessions?</p> <p>If no physical space is available onsite, are there local partners who may be willing to offer a location? Also, consider the physical readiness and technological capacity of your intended educational setting. Is there ADA accessible seating and enough space to accommodate your entire group? Will you be able to access the internet and present educational material effectively?</p>	Yes/No
<p>Are your program site and prospective vendors accessible to your anticipated participant population?</p> <p>Are the physical locations your enrollees will be asked to visit walkable or accessible by public transportation?</p>	Yes/No
<p>Does your organization have connections to a health system or another clinical provider?</p> <p>At a minimum, your organization should have access to—whether onsite or through referrals—a clinical office at which you can collect biometrics pre-, during, and post-program. A referral network for primary care and other services also helps.</p>	Yes/No

If your answer to most of these questions is “Yes” then Veggie Rx may be right for you.

Get Set Up.

To begin a conversation about starting a Veggie Rx program, please contact Penn State Health Community Health at communityhealthprogramming@pennstatehealth.psu.edu or by calling: 717-531-0003, Ext. 289275.

When you're ready to commit, we'll help you take the first steps toward establishing Veggie Rx—and we'll be there to support you along the way.

Recruitment and Enrollment

A successful Veggie Rx program begins with successful recruitment efforts. Our team is here for support as you engage constituents and build a program base.

Vendors

Recruitment

Before you recruit participants and begin your program, you will need to establish partnerships with local farmers markets and/or grocery stores that will accept Veggie Rx produce vouchers. In selecting vendor partners, choose sites that are accessible via public transportation or, ideally, walkable. Also, note the selection of fruits and vegetables at prospective vendor sites—the wider the array, the better. Successful vendor recruitment avenues have historically included, but are not limited to:

- Enlisting the support of existing community partners.
- Contacting local economic development organizations.
- Promoting the program via existing email threads and listservs.
- Posting on physical and online community bulletin boards.

All vendor recruitment communications should address the following details:

- Program timeline.
- Expected frequency of visits from customers using produce vouchers.
- Overview of the invoice and reimbursement process.
- Contact information for program staff.

HELPFUL TIP:

Consider hosting a vendor orientation session either in person or online before your program launches. At this time, review important materials with vendor partners, overview the reimbursement process, and answer any questions.

Enrollment

Upon securing vendor interest in your Veggie Rx program, follow the steps below to formalize arrangements:

Work with the vendor to complete the Veggie Rx Vendor Registration Form, which will be sent to your organization from a Penn State staff member. This form should be returned to Penn State Health Community Health at: communityhealthprogramming@pennstatehealth.psu.edu.



The vendor then registers in Penn State's vendor portal. This process begins with the business owner sending an email to: communityhealthprogramming@pennstatehealth.psu.edu. Within a few days, the vendor will receive an invitation to register as a vendor with Penn State. The vendor will then follow the provided instructions for registration.



When your program launches, the vendor will begin collecting vouchers from participants at the time of check-out. Vouchers are good for face value on fresh fruits and vegetables and frozen vegetables. The entire cost of the voucher must be spent at the point of purchase. There is no cash back.



Each week, the vendor will count the number of vouchers collected and track the total number of dollars spent by Veggie Rx participants. Once a month, an invoice with weekly totals should be emailed to: communityhealthprogramming@pennstatehealth.psu.edu for payment.

These invoices should include:

- Name of business.
- Name of contact and phone number.
- Invoice number.
- Date of invoice.
- Weekly costs of vouchers redeemed.

Vouchers will be mailed monthly to Penn State.



Upon receipt of an invoice, Penn State sends payment directly to the vendor for the full value of vouchers redeemed. The process begins anew each month of the program.



Participants

Recruitment

First, determine the number of clients your Veggie Rx program can comfortably accommodate based on available space, personnel, and organizational resources. Then, decide on a recruitment timeline. Depending on your community's level of need and existing knowledge of the resources available to them, recruitment efforts may require anywhere from a few weeks to several months to fill your program quota. Plan accordingly.

Cast a wide net in your efforts to recruit participants. Successful participant recruitment avenues have historically included, but are not limited to:

- Promoting your program via existing email threads and listservs.
- Posting on physical and online community bulletin boards.
- Soliciting referrals from providers at health clinics.
- Contacting eligible patients on lists derived from clinic records.
- Posting flyers in waiting rooms, clinic rooms, farmers markets, WIC and SNAP offices, and communal spaces.
- Promoting your program via social media channels

Promotional materials should always include the following information:

- A succinct explanation of the program's objective.
- When and where the program will be offered as well as the program length and educational session dates.
- A reminder that Veggie Rx is free for all program participants.
- Enrollment deadline.
- Contact information for program staff.
- Names and logos of participating partners and sites.
- Visually exciting design elements, graphics, and/or photos.

HELPFUL TIP:

Recruitment materials for your program should be culturally and linguistically tailored to meet the needs of your target population. Penn State Health can partner with you to assess these needs and to develop appropriate strategies to communicate with your constituents in a language and style that will be most comfortable for them.



Enrollment

Enrolling in Veggie Rx is a multistep process requiring clear communication between program staff and prospective clients. Enrollment processes may vary slightly across partner sites but will generally include the following steps:

- 1** A patient receives a recommendation from a clinician or self-identifies interest in a Veggie Rx program based on program requirements that you and your staff have selected. For example, a Veggie Rx program focused on diabetes and prediabetes may implement the following enrollment criteria:
 - Must be 18 years of age or older.
 - Must be a Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus patient.
 - Must have an A1C level of 7.0 or above.
 - BMI must be 25 or above.
- 2** A staff member or clinician at a partner site collects participants' A1C level, blood pressure, weight, BMI, and demographic information around the time of program enrollment, both for baseline assessment and for confirmation that each participant satisfies your enrollment criteria.
- 3** The patient will fill out official Veggie Rx enrollment forms with a staff member. These forms include:
 - Evaluation consent form.
 - Enrollment form.
 - Pre-program survey.
- 4** At the time of enrollment, a staff member at your site should provide new participants with a folder containing the following information:
 - A copy of their consent form.
 - Information about their Veggie Rx experience, including class times, a list of program contacts, and other details specific to the program.
 - A list of local vendors that will accept Veggie Rx vouchers, their addresses, and available means of public transportation to arrive there.

Programming

Getting Started

Check box here	There are a few things to get in order before your Veggie Rx kickoff.
	<p>Define a program timeline and select dates and times. Former Veggie Rx partner sites have had success running the program on a variety of schedules, including, but not limited to, once monthly for a year and biweekly for a total of six weeks.</p> <p>Flexibility in scheduling is often required to meet the needs of all program participants. Historically, our partners have found success in offering options during the evening hours, on weekends, or even during the school day, especially for parents and guardians who may not otherwise have access to childcare.</p>
	<p>Confirm arrangements with local vendors. Before distributing produce vouchers to your clients, confirm that all participating farmers markets and grocery stores have signed a Veggie Rx Vendor Registration Form and registered with Penn State's vendor portal. Also, ensure that all community partners are clear on the reimbursement process (see page 15 for more details).</p>
	<p>Reserve space for educational sessions. Select a classroom space that will be accessible to all participants. Ensure that the destination is walkable or along public transportation routes and confirm that the space is reserved for your use. In selecting a location, also consider your participants' likely childcare needs and options for meeting them.</p>
	<p>Coordinate staffing needs. At the very least, designate one qualified staff member to serve as a dedicated Veggie Rx program manager or coordinator. Alternatively, develop a strategy to divide program responsibilities among several staff members. We suggest allotting three hours weekly for Veggie Rx-related work: one hour for class sessions, prep time, and paperwork and administration, respectively.</p>
	<p>Collect program materials from Penn State Health Community Health. Before your program start date, coordinate with Penn State Health's Community Health office to retrieve the program curriculum, educational materials, program surveys, and Veggie Rx vouchers.</p>

Curriculum and Content Development

Penn State has developed a standardized Veggie Rx program curriculum based on best practices in scientific literature and the real-world experiences of our Veggie Rx community partners. Our goal is to offer a comprehensive framework for educational programming while allowing each partner site the opportunity to customize individual lesson plans based on the needs of their client population.

The comprehensive program curriculum will be distributed to your organization after signing on. While we have standard materials used in prior iterations of Veggie Rx, the curriculum you receive will be reflective of your program purpose and target population. We will work closely with you after signing on to begin developing an educational framework for your program.

Lesson Plans

The staff member(s) tapped to run Veggie Rx educational programming at your site will use our standardized curriculum to create lesson plans, in-class presentations, and activities. While the details of each lesson plan are left to your discretion, a few lesson-planning tips can help to guide your thinking:

- 1** Write lesson objectives that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-specific (SMART). Each component of an educational session should be related to achieving one or more of your SMART lesson objectives. See the sample lesson plan on the next page for examples.
- 2** Include a list of materials that should be onsite or brought with you for the educational session.
- 3** Incorporate estimated time stamps and durations for each component of your lesson plan to ensure you have neither too little nor too much planned for your allotted time.
- 4** When delivering information via presentation, use clear and concise text on any slides, and be sure to provide translations that your audience might find helpful.
- 5** Plan to offer real-world examples of course concepts in action that are applicable to your clients' everyday lives. Also, engage your audience by choosing activities that will reinforce content in a unique and exciting manner.
- 6** Consider educational resources that will enhance the experience of Veggie Rx clients. Can you run interactive surveys on an iPad? Do you have games or props onsite to bring lessons to life? Can you enhance activities by including a translator who speaks the native language of your program participants?

A sample lesson plan, based on the standardized Veggie Rx curriculum, is on the following page.

Sample Lesson Plan

LESSON TOPIC: NUTRITION LABEL READING

Lesson Objectives

1. By the end of the lesson, all participants will be able to identify serving size, calories, fiber, and carbohydrate contents on a nutrition label.
2. By the end of the lesson, all participants will be able to recall the 5 & 20 rule.

List of necessary materials

Handouts/Materials Needed

- The Nutrition Fact Label/La Etiqueta de Datos de Nutrición (www.learningaboutdiabetes.org)

Class Plan

Before Class: In the previous class, ask participants to bring a food label with them for this class. It should be the label of a food they eat often and/or want help deciding if the food is a healthy choice.

Class Intro (5 minutes):

- ASK: What do you currently look for when reading food labels?
- ASK: What questions do you have about reading food labels? What questions do you want cleared up by the end of today's class? **Write questions on a whiteboard, to be referenced during the class.

Reading Food Labels (20 minutes):

- Share the nutrition label handout through the projector for everyone to see and give participants a food label handout in English or in Spanish.
- Encourage participants to reference the food label they brought during this discussion.
- Discuss 3 "Rules of Thumb" for Understanding Food Labels
 1. Check the serving size. How many servings will you be eating?
 2. Pay attention to carbohydrates: Total Carbohydrates; Total Sugar vs. Added Sugar; Fiber.
 3. Use the 5 & 20 Rule: 5% or less in daily recommended value (DV) is "LOW" in that nutrient. Healthy packaged foods are low in saturated fat, sodium & added sugar. Limit foods that are low in fiber, vitamins, and minerals. 10% or more of DV is "HIGH," and 20% or more of DV is "VERY HIGH." Healthy packaged foods are high in fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Limit foods that are high in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar.
- Share a "Bonus Tip"—The Altman Rule: Add together the grams of fiber and grams of protein on the food label. Compare this total to grams of added sugar. If the total is greater than the grams of added sugar, the food is a healthy choice. If the total is less than the grams of added sugar, limit how often this food is eaten. The term was coined by Dr. Wayne Altman, chair of Family Medicine at Tufts University.

Culturally and linguistically inclusive materials

Practice Reading Food Labels (15 minutes): Bring in a variety of food labels and have participants decide if the foods are healthy choices.

Relevant interactive experience to enhance learning

Conclusion (15 minutes)

- Refer to questions asked in the beginning of class. Answer any questions that have not yet been answered and allow time for further questions.
- REFLECT: What label reading tip was most helpful to you today?
- ACTION ITEM: Encourage participants to complete at least 1 of the following challenges before the next session: Look in your food cupboards and find all the foods that include added sugar; Look in your food cupboards and find which three foods are highest in fiber; Identify 3 foods that meet the Altman Rule.

Estimated time for each lesson component

Applicable, real-world examples

Lesson Planning Best Practices

Language

Consider the linguistic background of your clients. Will your program be more accessible by providing materials in both English and another language? If so, the team at Penn State is available to assist in meeting the cultural and linguistic needs of your participants, or we can point you in the direction of those individuals best suited to help.

Reading level

Any print or digital materials created for in-class presentations and activities should be at no higher than a fifth-grade reading level. Various online resources are available to help assess the reading level of your materials as well as the Readability tool in Microsoft Word.

Tips for Running Your Program

Delivering educational sessions

Begin each session by distributing the pre-lesson survey, which is included in the Veggie Rx program materials distributed by Penn State. Allow sufficient time for each attendee to complete the survey before beginning your lesson. Following each class, distribute the post-lesson survey, also included in your Veggie Rx materials from Penn State, which will assist your organization in evaluating learning outcomes and progress. Finally, distribute the Veggie Rx produce vouchers once participants have completed all surveys and class activities. Offer weekly reminders of where your clients can use these vouchers and review transportation options as needed.

Maintaining contact with participants

Consider sending regular communications to your Veggie Rx clients to remind them of upcoming educational sessions. Email, personal calls, and text messages may work particularly well for these purposes, especially in the lead up to the program launch and each individual educational session.

Adjusting along the way

Periodically revisit your educational programming by reviewing participant responses to surveys and gauging involvement levels during sessions. Contact Penn State Health Community Health at communityhealthprogramming@pennstatehealth.psu.edu for ideas on how to address any issues that arise.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Periodically assessing progress will help you to stay on track to achieve your program goals—and to ensure that your clients are getting the most out of their Veggie Rx experience. Various monitoring and evaluation techniques can help you to adjust your Veggie Rx program during its run, demonstrate your success once concluded, and help you to make decisions about future direction. Just as important, concrete evidence of program success can assist in securing buy-in and generating goodwill among community partners.

Below, we have included four evaluation pillars, which can be used to guide your thinking, as well as potential evaluation methods to help you gauge the effectiveness of your program. The team at Penn State Health's Office of Community Health can work with you to develop effective program evaluation techniques at regular intervals throughout your program run as well as at your program's conclusion.

Evaluation Pillars

1 Physical Health and Wellness

Why measure it?

You likely began Veggie Rx to improve one or more chronic health conditions among your population of interest. To assess if your program is making a difference, be sure to recollect biometrics that were used as enrollment criteria, which can continue to serve as primary indicators of progress toward your target outcome. For example, Veggie Rx programs focused on diabetes and prediabetes might collect blood A1C level, blood pressure, weight, and BMI at program enrollment and again at the program's conclusion. If your program is longer than three months, you might also consider periodic biometric collection to assess progress during your program.

How to measure it

Work with your own clinical staff or a clinical partner that can collect biometrics at designated times before, throughout, and after your program. Compare individual biometrics to those from the program start for each participant and, when available, compare averages or other summary statistics for your participants as a cohort.

2 Educational Programming and Quality

Why measure it?

Your clients' comprehension of the course curriculum will influence all other metrics of success, and measuring their understanding of critical concepts in nutrition, exercise, and more can help you to determine whether they are on track to a healthier lifestyle.

How to measure it

Use pre- and post-class surveys and quizzes to assess your clients' familiarity with course content and to gauge their learning. Additionally, administer post-program surveys about their experience in the classroom, soliciting feedback on the quality of each session, the applicability of course content to their everyday lives, and more. Again, if your program is longer than three months, you might consider periodic surveys of your participants' overall experience, in addition to pre- and post-session knowledge checks.



3 Participation and Voucher Usage

Why measure it?

Tracking voucher expenditures will help you to understand whether program participants are making use of Veggie Rx funds. Likewise, tracking client participation in educational programming sessions, surveys, and check-ins will help to assess their level of commitment and determine potential barriers to participation and adherence.

How to measure it

Consider tracking your voucher conversion rate, which is the percentage of distributed Veggie Rx vouchers that are redeemed for produce. Collaborate with Penn State Health's Office of Community Health and your community partners to obtain the data necessary to calculate your voucher conversion rate.

Additionally, consider monitoring the type of produce that program participants are most frequently purchasing with their vouchers. This may vary depending on the season, but knowledge of which products your clients gravitate toward can be a useful tool in directing educational programming and tailoring content to meet their needs. You can work directly with your Veggie Rx vendor partners to request informal tallies of product purchases and to develop more formal mechanisms for tracking trends in voucher usage.

Finally, if you have engaged multiple vendors partners in your Veggie Rx program, track which sites are most frequented by your voucher users. This can be noted informally or formally. For example, consider tracking the proportion of your total distributed vouchers used at each participating grocery store or farmers market, respectively.

4 Accessibility

Why measure it?

To be successful, all facets of your program must be accessible to every member of your target population. Meeting times and locations must be chosen thoughtfully, and community partners should be selected with an eye toward ease of access. Without appropriate, equitable measures in place to smooth the Veggie Rx experience for all participants, you are unlikely to achieve high rates of participation nor improved health outcomes.

How to measure it

In program surveys, include questions about your participants' experiences accessing vendors and how they arrive to class. Additionally, observe other metrics of participation like your class attendance rate and voucher conversion rate and question how issues of transportation, scheduling conflicts, and other accessibility questions may be at play. Engage your clients and vendor partners in informal conversations, too, to gauge potential issues of accessibility and source inspiration for modifications.

Program Sustainability



Observations gathered during your first **Veggie Rx** cycle can help to identify changes that will facilitate substantial and sustainable levels of community impact. Aside from modifications stemming from your own monitoring and evaluation efforts, there are a few ways to continue building your program—and partnerships in the community—in a way that will encourage sustainable growth. Here are a few suggestions:

Establish or Partner With a Community Garden

Community gardens are collaborative spaces offering plots for individuals and community organizations to grow produce that can be harvested for personal use or donation. Consider partnering with a local community garden, or, if space and resources are available, consider starting one at your site or in tandem with another organization. Not only do community gardens offer a sustainable source of produce for Veggie Rx, but they can also act as a powerful, hands-on educational tool for participants enrolled in Veggie Rx educational programming.

HELPFUL TIP:

Whenever possible, seek to support Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). CSA communities offer collective support to an agricultural operation and, together, assume the risks and rewards of planting and harvesting produce together. Supporting CSA through a Veggie Rx partnership is a great way to gain access to valuable Veggie Rx resources and to deepen roots in the local community.

Develop a Food Box Program Alongside a Vendor or Community Partner

Food box programs coordinate the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables from producers and facilitate the delivery of items directly to consumers or a central pickup location. Developing a food box model may help to eliminate certain accessibility challenges, especially for programs with a particularly low voucher conversion rate.

Build Relationships With Other Food Access Systems

When it comes to program sustainability, maintaining ties with well-resourced partners is the name of the game. Many health systems and regional food pantries have seasoned staff and established programs in the nutrition and disease prevention space. By partnering with these entities, you can build relationships that will enhance your offerings and open new avenues of support for your Veggie Rx clients. These resources will be particularly helpful once your program ends, and your participants begin searching for continued support on their wellness journeys.

Visit www.centralpafoodbank.org/find-help/find-food/ to use the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank's "Find Food" tool. This resource can help you to locate pantries in your region, which you can contact to gauge interest in a partnership. For Veggie Rx programs in Berks County, visit: helpingharvest.org/find-food/ to use a similar "Find Food" function to locate pantries and potential partners in your area.

Work With Existing Age-Specific Community Programming

From elementary, middle, and high schools to senior citizen centers and assisted living communities, there are various pre-established pockets of the community with a vested interest in nutritional education and programming. By seeking out partnerships with age-specific programs, you can focus your recruitment and programming efforts on subpopulations that are either most likely to need or most likely to benefit from Veggie Rx.



A Note From Our Veggie Rx Leaders



Amber Coleman, MA, MBA
Director, Community Health
Penn State Health

Thank you for your interest in Veggie Rx and for considering Penn State Health as a partner in advancing your community health objectives. We are committed to understanding the needs of the populations we serve and to delivering programs that promote overall well-being while addressing disparities in health outcomes. Our health system's mission extends beyond traditional medical care to include initiatives that strengthen communities and improve quality of life across Pennsylvania. This approach guides our efforts to create innovative, evidence-based programs that respond directly to identified community needs and foster long-term health equity.

Developed in collaboration with health care providers and key community stakeholders, Veggie Rx reflects our holistic approach to community-based programming. The initiative aligns with our collective commitment to promoting wellness, preventing disease and advancing health equity, which are core priorities identified in the health system's Community Health Needs Assessment. Central to the program is our dedication to improving cardiovascular health through access to fresh, nutritious produce.

Penn State Health's mission is to continually improve the health and well-being of the people of Pennsylvania and beyond. We accomplish this with breakthrough medicine, research-driven innovation and evidence-based community programs that make a lasting impact. Through Veggie Rx and other related initiatives, we strive to reduce the burden of chronic conditions affecting patients, families and communities across Pennsylvania. Our work extends beyond clinical care to address the social determinants of health that shape these outcomes.

In addition to providing technical assistance to our Veggie Rx partner sites, we are committed to sharing our expertise with other health systems, academic institutions, and community organizations developing similar interventions within their regions. If you believe your community could benefit from the Veggie Rx program, we invite you to connect with us. Together, we can create meaningful and lasting changes in population health and community well-being.

Respectfully,
Amber Coleman, MA, MBA
Director, Community Health Penn State Health

Penn State's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) project advances the University and health system's community health objectives while mobilizing Penn State's values of equity and inclusion. According to our most recent Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), 22 percent of Hispanic/Latino respondents—the population directly served by REACH programming—reported having diabetes compared to 16 percent of non-Hispanics/Latinos. The Veggie Rx program is helping us to erase this gap and improve health outcomes for all.

By offering access to fresh produce and education in diet-related decision-making, Veggie Rx is empowering individual community members with the resources they need to take charge of their well-being. As the program continues, we are learning how to better serve our community members through active collaboration and constant feedback. And, thanks to the expertise of our bilingual REACH and Penn State faculty and staff members, our work is always culturally and linguistically appropriate for our constituents.

As Veggie Rx continues to evolve and reach new communities across the Commonwealth, we are committed to continuing to work with and among our patients to provide the best education, counseling, and support services possible. I hope you will consider joining us in this endeavor and becoming our partner in bringing Veggie Rx to your community.



Andrea Murray, MPH
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Approaches to
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Veggie Rx Toolkit



PennState Health



REACH



PennState
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