

One Year Out: Impacts of the RBHS Food Pantry in the Face of Food Insecurity

*Written by Ashley Eng
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The United States has long known about and tried to address food insecurity, but food insecurity in healthcare is often underestimated or overlooked. The field is composed not only of medical providers such as physicians and nurses, but also students, academic, faculty, administrative staff, custodial staff, etc. The practice of medicine is only made possible by the myriad of people who encompass the health care field. Although healthcare accounts for a substantial amount of the United States' revenue, most members of the health care field do not have a disposable income to support their households.

The U.S Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as "a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food," covering a wide spectrum of the food insecurity people experience. This not only includes a total lack of food but also inadequate quantities of food and lack of access to preferred food, whether for health or dietary restriction reasons. This burden is exacerbated when needing to provide for more people in the household, most commonly children, spouses, elderly parents, or extended family members.



The city of Newark is the largest in New Jersey, with a correspondingly large and diverse population. Yet, unfortunately, our vibrant community suffers the burden of poverty, with the poverty rate estimated at 24%, which is much higher than the national average (2). Along with increased poverty comes increased food insecurity, which is made even worse by insufficient physical access to quantity and quality of food—a term coined as food deserts.

"One in ten households in the United States experiences food insecurity"

USDA ERS - Key Statistics & Graphics



Rutgers New Jersey Medical School and its affiliate University Hospital are nestled in the heart of Newark and were established on the principle of giving back to this community.

To address the burden of food insecurity in the community, Rutgers opened the Rutgers Biomedical Health Sciences (RBHS) food pantry to aid Rutgers students, staff, and faculty. Since its opening in September 2021, it has played an integral role in supplying food while also curbing food waste.

The RBHS pantry receives its stock from the Community Food Bank of New Jersey (CFBNJ) and donations from local grocery stores and community members. Under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Governor Phil Murphy signed the Coronavirus Relief Fund into action, which provided millions of dollars to providing food to the state, \$5 million of which went to the CFBNJ. Because of this, the RBHS food pantry has been receiving stock from the CFBNJ free of charge since April 2021.



The pantry is open every Tuesday from 12:30-3:00 pm and is available to anyone in the RBHS community (i.e., anyone with a Rutgers ID card [student, staff, faculty])



As diapers and menstrual products are inevitable needs, they are also always in high demand. Each month, the pantry provides over 100 children with diapers.

It is clear that a simple food pantry that occupies no more than one room, smaller than the size of an average university classroom, is having a great impact and serving the RBHS-Newark community. With the increased food insecurity since the Covid-19 pandemic and the ever-increasing prices of necessary everyday items, the pantry has been valuable in supporting the patrons in need.

The food stock is as diverse as possible to accommodate everyone's preferences and needs while remaining in the confines of our small pantry, which only has one refrigerator/freezer. Stock varies weekly and can include a range of fresh produce, canned goods, frozen meat, shelf-stable snacks, condiments, and grains. In addition to providing food for patrons, hygiene products are also provided, which include baby diapers, menstrual products, hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes, soap, and toothbrushes.

The RBHS food pantry is led by Mr. Fabricio Salas and Dr. Joachim Sackey of the School of Health Professions, with the help of volunteers from the Rutgers community, without whom running the pantry would not be impossible.

In the one year of operation between September 2021 and September 2022, the RBHS food pantry served a nearly 15,000 people from roughly 4,000 different households. Between all the weekly operations, 118,512 pounds of food have been provided to patrons. Within the storage restrictions of our pantry, the most requested items include cartons of milk, apple juice, breakfast cereal, single-serving beverages, peanut butter, and dried and canned legumes. In addition, several items are in very high demand, but they are not often offered due to our limited storage capacity or the CFBNJ not often having them in stock. This includes fresh produce, frozen meats, nuts, flour, and cooking oil.





In addition to the RBHS food pantry, the Rutgers Newark undergraduate campus has a pantry called pantryRUN, which also serves its students once per week. While the RBHS food pantry is indeed available to anyone with a Rutgers ID card, pantryRUN is an additional resource that is more conveniently located for Rutgers Newark undergraduate students. With both pantries running, Rutgers University has shown great efforts in providing for people in its community.

The RBHS food pantry, which has been open since September 2021 and operates only one day per week, has quickly shown promising results. Due to the CARES Act, the pantry has also required little to no financing, but this governmental aid is soon expiring. As we hope to continue addressing food insecurity within our Rutgers RBHS community, we need your help. Please consider helping the pantry in a variety of ways:

- Donate your time and effort by signing up for a volunteer shift.
- Donate goods by dropping them off at our site or sending them through our Amazon wish list.
- Make a monetary donation through our donation portal.

We thank you in advance for any contribution. It takes a village to feed a village!

-Ashley Eng

Sources

1. "Key Statistics & Graphics." USDA ERS - Key Statistics & Graphics, 7 Sept. 2022, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/#foodsecure>.
2. U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: Newark City, New Jersey. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/newarkcitynewjersey>.



Ashley Eng

A 2025 medical student candidate at the New Jersey Medical School, Ashley is passionate about supporting her community. A long-standing volunteer at the RBHS Food Pantry, she was drawn to how food insecurity affects her fellow students and the Newark community. We admire Ashley's efforts in highlighting the ever-present effects food insecurity has and the work the RBHS Food Pantry is doing to support the RBHS - Newark community.

For more information about the RBHS Food Pantry, How to Donate, and more:

<https://academichealth.rutgers.edu/rbhs-food-pantry>

**Sign Up To
Volunteer Here:**



**For Info About
Donations:**



**RBHS Pantry
Amazon Wishlist:**



Donate items yourself or from vendor of choice:

RBHS Food Pantry [Attention: Fabricio Salas]
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65 Bergen St, Newark, NJ 07107