

# Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Success Story



## Expanding Free Food Markets to the South Bay

### Background

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) partnered with Venice Family Clinic (VFC) to implement strategies such as nutrition education, expanded/mobile produce distributions, promoting CalFresh-Food, and implementing food insecurity screening & referral systems to nutrition assistance programs. Founded in 1970, the mission of VFC is to provide quality primary health care to medically underserved communities. Today, they are a Federally Qualified Health Center with 17 sites providing a wide range of comprehensive, integrated, high-quality services to over 40,000 low-income people annually, serving the communities in and around the Westside and South Bay of Los Angeles, California. Although typically seen as affluent with some of the most expensive zip codes in the nation, VFC's service area includes racially segregated neighborhoods with pockets of extreme poverty and health disparities.

VFC ensures that everyone in their community who needs health care can access it. However, they know that medical services are not enough to ensure optimal health within the communities they serve. External factors, such as the built environment and lack of access to affordable and healthy foods, drastically impact health outcomes. Food insecurity, in particular, has been a barrier to good health for their patient population for years. In response, VFC worked to build partnerships with agencies such as Food Forward and Social Justice Learning Institute (SJLI) (a DPH-funded partner), and secure funding opportunities like CalFresh Healthy Living (CFHL), which helped them expand their programming to weekly access to healthy food events (known as Free Food Markets or FFMs) across multiple sites. FFMs provide hundreds of patients and community members with fresh produce, as well as shelf-stable pantry items provided through a partnership with Whole Foods.

### Body

#### **THE NEED: Challenge**

VFC assessed that nearly 50% of their patients experience food insecurity. Prior to November 2021, VFC's primary service area was Los Angeles County Service Planning Area (SPA) 5. In

November 2021, they merged with another Federally Qualified Health Center, South Bay Family Health Care, which served SPA 8 in the South Bay of Los Angeles County. According to the Los Angeles County Health Survey, 27.5% of households in SPA 8 with incomes <300% of the Federal Poverty Level are food insecure. This exceeds the County levels of 26.8%, as well as the SPA 5 rate of 18%.<sup>1</sup> In December 2022, VFC started planning to implement FFCs in SPA 8.

### **THE WORK: Solution**

In May 2023, VFC implemented access to healthy food events in their Inglewood La Brea clinic, in SPA 8.

Additionally, after they merged electronic health record systems (NextGen) with the new South Bay sites in December 2022, they were able to implement universal food insecurity screening for these sites as well. This screening is a part of the medical visit and is conducted by a medical assistant when prompted by the electronic health record. VFC also recently implemented the Hunger Vital Signs tool in their health record system, which alerts clinicians that the patient they are seeing is experiencing food insecurity, allowing them to direct the patient to the FFMs. VFC is excited to be able to refer South Bay patients to FFMs in their community.

### **THE IMPACT: Results**

The Inglewood La Brea free produce distribution has been well received by the community and patients of that clinic and has experienced growth in participation every month since May 2023. As of September 8, 2023, four FFMs were implemented at the Inglewood La Brea clinic, where 26,120 pounds of fresh produce was distributed to 2,026 individuals.

### **Sustaining Success:**

The success of the Inglewood La Brea FFM has encouraged VFC to continue to expand food distribution in the South Bay, and they continue to seek funding to support these events.

VFC has a strong history of fundraising and continues to attract diversified funding streams, allowing sustainability as an organization and the ability to launch and maintain new program initiatives as needed. They are committed to maximizing resources, assuring cost-effectiveness, and employing fiscal management procedures consistent with best practices, ensuring that FFMs can continue and expand in the South Bay.

With private funding, they have also been able to coordinate several popup FFMs at Carson High School, where they have a school-based clinic that is open to the broader community. The FFM at Carson on April 10, 2023 was featured in a story on KNBC news. This distribution was their second time coordinating a food giveaway at the school. [Click here to watch the news clip.](#) Additionally, VFC is also pursuing grant funding to add an FFM regularly at their Gardena clinic.

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<sup>1</sup> 2018 Los Angeles County Health Survey; Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

Another important way that VFC sustains the success of the FFMs and in-person nutrition education classes is through surveying participants and patients. This ensures that programming remains helpful, accessible, and culturally relevant.

## Favorite Quote

“Excelente idea para ayudar a las familias, muchísimas gracias.”

*“An excellent idea for helping families, many thanks.” – Participant at Inglewood La Brea FFMs*

“Gracias por su ayuda. Servira de mucho en mi hogar =)”

*“Thank you for the resources. This will help immensely in our home.” – Participant at Inglewood La Brea FFMs*

## Photograph



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