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COLORADO EVALUATION
AND ACTION LAB

Colorado Lab Newsletter

March 2021

Featured in this newsletter:

- Food Insecurity in Mesa County
- Brain Injury Support in Criminal Justice System

Equipping Doctors & Teachers to Combat Food Insecurity



As a practicing physician in Mesa County, Anne Nederveld, MD MPH wanted to learn how to better identify patients experiencing food insecurity, and find ways to effectively connect them to reliable, nutritious resources.

The study Dr. Nederveld led on behalf of the University of Colorado Denver, the Quality Health Network, and the Colorado Lab began with interviews and a survey of community members, medical providers and staff, and staff at social service agencies in Mesa County. Findings revealed disparate beliefs about the causes of food insecurity, stigma associated with food insecurity, and varied levels of comfort in discussing food insecurity. Some medical providers and staff appeared to not understand the lived experience of food insecurity and why community members might not answer questions about food insecurity honestly or be reluctant to discuss food resources and services.

With food insecurity increasing significantly in the wake of Covid-19, findings were quickly transformed into an online learning module. The [40 minute training](#) video includes information on the causes of food insecurity, resources available in the community, and barriers that prevent families from accessing resources. Recognizing that many families who experience food insecurity are not in regular contact with the health care system, the training offers strategies that both health care providers and educators can use to identify families in need of support and connect them to resources.

When the video was piloted with a small group of 17 health care staff and 26 education staff, nearly all agreed or strongly agreed that the information provided would be useful for their work, that the training had increased their

knowledge about food insecurity and local resources, and that it made them feel better equipped to communicate with patients and families about food insecurity.

These user experience insights on the effectiveness of the training module, together with a planned second phase of research to explore ways to increase the success of screening and referral processes, aim to equip trusted medical providers and school personnel as messengers in the fight to end food insecurity.

Organizations interested in using the training module in their own work are welcome to contact Dr. Nederveld at andrea.nederveld@cuanschutz.edu.

Agencies allied in this research project include:

- Colorado Department of Education
- Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Economic Security
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Nutrition Services
- Mesa County WIC, SNAP, and Public Health

Colorado Lab Study Prompts Legislation to Improve Brain Injury Support in Criminal Justice System



[SB21-138](#) has been introduced into the Colorado Legislature to improve support for individuals in the criminal justice system with a brain injury. Research shows that 25 percent to 87 percent of inmates report having experienced a traumatic brain injury (TBI), compared to 8.5 percent of the general population.

Prompted by the Colorado Lab-supported study [Reducing Recidivism for Justice Involved Individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury](#), this bill aims to create a brain injury pilot program through the Colorado Department of Corrections to determine whether a comprehensive brain injury program will improve outcomes for offenders. If approved, the pilot program will put into effect four key strategies to better support those in the criminal justice system with TBI in successfully completing incarceration and/or supervision, re-entering the community, and avoiding re-offense:

1. Train criminal justice staff about the prevalence and consequences of TBI;
2. Ensure the criminal justice population is screened for TBI and that those identified are also screened for impairment;
3. Tailor the approach to management of individuals with TBI, providing specific strategies to mitigate the effects of the identified impairment; and
4. Educate individuals with TBI so they can better understand how their TBI affects them and learn how to compensate for their deficits.

[This study](#) was led by Dr. Kim Gorgens of the University of Denver in partnership with the Colorado Judicial Branch, Division of Probation Services, Colorado Department of Human Services, MINDSOURCE Brain Injury Network, and the Colorado Lab.

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University of Denver
Frank H. Ricketson Law Building
2255 E. Evans Ave
Denver, CO 80208

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