

Philanthropy & Nonprofits

Viewpoint: Providing access to healthy meals during Hunger Action Month

By Jerry Sargent and David B. Waters – President, Citizens Bank, Massachusetts, and CEO, Community Servings

Each night, more than 700,000 Massachusetts residents go to bed hungry.

Contrary to what many people believe, those who suffer from food insecurity are spread across the state, in suburbs and cities, in rural areas and urban neighborhoods, in Greater Boston as well as the western part of our state.

It's not just Massachusetts. A staggering number of Americans — nearly 42 million — struggle with access to food. Many individuals and families are living at or below the poverty line. Some are too sick to prepare their own meals. Others are living in “food deserts,” places that lack grocery stores or access to fresh foods. Hunger affects families and children in all of our communities.

When a person goes through the day not knowing where their next meal will come from, their ability to succeed — mentally, physically, academically and economically — is severely diminished. These effects also lead to high levels of unemployment, financial troubles, and chronic illnesses. According to Feeding America, one out of every six children struggles with hunger. Hungry children often have difficulty learning, are sick more often, and are prone to behavioral problems.

While poverty, income and demographics are sure factors tied to food insecurity, the need for action remains clear: We must provide access to healthy meals across Massachusetts to our most vulnerable neighbors. Doing so will go a long way to help people lead more productive lives.

In September we recognize Hunger Action Month and the need for increased access to healthy, nutritious meals who are too sick to shop and cook for themselves or their families. Healthy meals not only fill up a stomach – they help the critically ill manage devastating illnesses like HIV/AIDS, cancer, renal and heart diseases, and diabetes. That's why Citizens Bank has partnered with [Community Servings](#) to help make sure

our most vulnerable neighbors, the critically and chronically ill, get the food and nutrition they need to heal.

Each year, [Community Servings](#) prepares and delivers 675,000 meals and nutrition services to individuals and families living with critical and chronic illnesses. They provide the correct balance of nutrients for a patient's complex medical needs, as they are often battling multiple health issues simultaneously. Sherys, a Community Servings' client, has been battling breast cancer which has impacted all aspects of her life and ability to provide for her family. As a single mom of three girls, Sherys struggles to make ends meet often not having enough resources to purchase food for her family. Her medical health aid suggested Community Servings, knowing that during her intense treatments, she did not have the energy to shop or cook for herself or her family. The meals from Community Servings were able to supplement her SNAP benefits and provide a weeks' worth of medically tailored meals she needed during her treatments and child-friendly meals for her children, which are healthy nutritious options. Simply put, the meals which were prepared and delivered to Sherys and her family, removed the financial stress of providing meals to her household and allowed Sherys to focus on getting her cancer into remission.

We invite you to take action in ending hunger and recognizing the power of healthy meals in our communities. There's a role every Massachusetts resident can play. Through donations or volunteering at your local hunger nonprofits, you can make a meaningful difference in the lives of our critically ill neighbors, and at risk families, and send the message to those in greatest need that we care.

[Jerry Sargent](#) is the President, Citizens Bank, Massachusetts. David B. Waters is the CEO, [Community Servings](#).