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Resources for Addressing Food Insecurity and Other Social Determinants of Health in Worcester, Massachusetts

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Resources for Addressing Food Insecurity and Other Social Determinants of Health in Worcester, Massachusetts

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What are social determinants of health?

Social determinants of health (SDOH) are the environmental, social, and economic factors that can impact people's quality of life and health. Examples of SDOH are where people live, the environment they live in, their employment and/or education, their socioeconomic status, and access to resources and basic needs such as food.

Factors that influence food insecurity

Food insecurity is influenced by several factors including socioeconomic status, education, income, employment, race/ethnicity, structural racism, and disability status. Food insecurity can be linked to many other health concerns such as tobacco use, substance use, heart disease, diabetes, and other diseases. Food insecurity and smoking operate as risk factors for one another. People who smoke may spend more of their income on cigarettes, which leaves them less money to spend on food. Chronic food insecurity can increase stress and some people may smoke to alleviate stress and/or use smoking as an appetite suppressant, which may further dependence on nicotine.

[The Central Massachusetts Tobacco-Free Community Partnership \(MTCP\) is working to address these concerns](#)

There are initiatives underway to begin to address these important health concerns. The Massachusetts Tobacco

What is food insecurity?

Food insecurity is the lack of consistent access to enough affordable and nutritional food for every person in a household to live an active and healthy life. Food insecurity is a pressing issue in many areas including Central Massachusetts. Many communities and populations have experienced food insecurity, and these groups were especially affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Challenges with food insecurity have also adversely affected people of color.

Cessation and Prevention Program is a statewide public health program focused on comprehensive approaches to reduce tobacco and nicotine use. The mission is to reduce the health and economic burden of tobacco use by preventing young people from starting to use tobacco and nicotine products, helping current tobacco and nicotine users to quit, protecting children and adults from secondhand smoke, and identifying and eliminating tobacco-related disparities.

Social determinants of health are often interconnected and addressing one of these determinants in isolation may not be enough. Thus, it is important to connect people that have been marginalized by structural racism and/or are at risk for poor social determinants of health with resources to address these needs. Below is a list of resources available in the Worcester community to help families and community partners navigate local and state resources to address food insecurity and other social determinants of health.

Food Insecurity

- **The Worcester County Food Bank** (<https://foodbank.org/find-food/>) is a community-based organization committed to creating a hunger free community. Please call (508) 842-3663
- **El Buen Samaritano** (<https://ebsamaritano.org/>) is a non-profit community-based organization that provides food relief and other resources to families. Please call (774) 253-1619
- **Department of Transitional Assistance DTA** (<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/departament-of-transitional-assistance>) provides direct economic assistance (cash benefits) and food assistance (**SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)** benefits/ Food Stamps), as well as workforce training opportunities. Please call (877) 382-2363

Food Insecurity (cont.)

- » **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) HIP (Healthy Incentives Program)** puts money back on your EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) card when you use SNAP to buy healthy, local fruits and vegetables from HIP farm vendors. **Please call (877) 382-2363**
- » **SNAP Retail Locator** helps you map out and identify participating SNAP retail locations within a 0 – 2.5-mile radius of the address, zip code, or place you enter (<https://usda-fns.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=e1f3028b217344d78b324193b10375e4>)
- **The Restaurant Meal Programs (Coming Soon)** allows older adults (age 60 or over), homeless individuals, and people with disabilities to buy food at authorized restaurants and food trucks using their SNAP EBT card (website under construction).
- **The Worcester Community Fridges** (<https://woofridge.org/donations/>) is a community run organization that provide daily access to fresh and healthy foods at no cost to everyone through fridges located in the community. To find a fridge near you click [Locations | Woo Fridge](#)
- **Women, Infants, & Children Nutrition Program (WIC)** (<https://www.mass.gov/wic-information-for-participants>) is available to low to moderate income pregnant women, recently delivered women, breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutrition risk. **Please call (508) 796-7000**

Tobacco/Vaping Cessation

- **The Massachusetts Tobacco Cessation and Prevention Program (MTCP)** is a statewide public health program focused on comprehensive approaches to reduce tobacco and nicotine use. (<https://www.mass.gov/massachusetts-tobacco-cessation-and-prevention-program-mtcp>)
- **The Massachusetts Clearinghouse** provides free health promotion materials for Massachusetts residents and health and social service providers. (<https://massclearinghouse.ehs.state.ma.us/category/Vaping.html>).
- **The Smokefree.gov** (<https://smokefree.gov/>) is a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' efforts to reduce smoking rates in the United States. The website has tools and tips for quitting tobacco.
- **1-800 QUIT NOW** is the national portal to all state Quit Lines. The number can also connect you with one-on-one counselors and quit-smoking groups in your area, and help you find out if your health insurance covers tobacco quit services.
- **My Life My Quit Coaching** (<https://ma.mylifemyquit.org/index>) is free and confidential way to quit smoking or vaping. Text "Start My Quit" to 36072 or click to chat with a coach.
- **Stay Quit Coach** (<https://mobile.va.gov/app/stay-quit-coach>) is a mobile app that provides tools, strategies, and motivational messages to help reduce or quit use of tobacco products. Available for iPhone and Android.
- **Tobacco Free Kids Campaign** (<https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/us-resources>) is an advocacy organization working to reduce tobacco use and its deadly consequences in the United States and around the world.
- **This is Quitting Texting Program** (<https://truthinitiative.org/thisisquitting>) is a free anonymous text messaging program from Truth Initiative designed to help young people quit vaping. Teens and young adults can join for free by texting DITCHVAPE to 88709.
- **Calling it Quit Resources for Youth** offers comprehensive resources and tools around youth vaping, mental health, and more. (<https://www.publichealthdegrees.org/resources/teenagers-vaping-and-nicotine-cessation/>)
- **CATCH My Breath** (<https://catchinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CATCH-My-Breath-One-Pager.pdf>) is a peer-reviewed, evidence-based youth vaping program that provides up-to-date information to teachers, parents, and health professionals to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to make informed decisions about the use of e-cigarettes, including JUUL devices.

Housing/Utilities

- **The Worcester Housing Authority (WHA)** (<https://www.worcesterha.org/>) offers decent, safe, and affordable housing options for stability and self-sufficiency for Worcester residents that qualify for services.
 - » **A Better Life Program** (https://www.worcesterha.org/how_to_apply_abl.html) by the WHA is to help families move forward into self-sufficient housing.
- **Worcester Community Action Council**
 - » **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program** (<https://wcac.net/fuel-assistance/>) provides fuel assistance or home heating assistance to help homeowners and renters that qualify pay home heating bills and past due balances on utility bills.
 - » **Rental Assistance** (<https://www.wcac.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Rental-Utility-Assistance-Declaration-Form.pdf>) program offers emergency rental assistance to qualifying tenants at risk of eviction due to economic impact.
- » **Weatherization Assistance Program** (<https://wcac.net/energy-saving-programs/>) provides households with the opportunity to permanently reduce their energy bills.
- **Utilities.** Many utility companies also offer assistance for people that have difficulty paying their bills. Contact them as soon as possible if you need help.
 - » Cable TV: [Spectrum](#)
 - » Electricity: [National Grid](#)
 - » Gas: [Eversource](#)
 - » Telephone: [Verizon](#)

Transportation

- **The WRTA** (<https://www.therta.com/>) offers free, dependable, comfortable, and safe transportation for traveling to work, shopping, school, medical appointments, and leisure activities.
- **Trinity Transport LLC** provides reliable non-emergency medical transportation services in Worcester, Massachusetts, to seniors, disabled persons, and those with special needs at an affordable price. Please call (508) 340-7660.

Job Training and Employment Assistance

- **SNAP Path to Work Program** for eligible SNAP recipients (<https://www.snappathtowork.org/>) connects SNAP recipients with services and resources in the community for finding and keeping a job.
- **Masshire Worcester Career Center** (<https://masshirecentralcc.com/>) has programs designed to assist job seekers.
- **Coming Home Worcester** (<https://www.cominghome.worcester.org/>) is a resource that presents valuable information for ex-offenders about the services available in our community.
- **Training Resources and Internship Networks (TRAIN) Program** (https://www.mass.edu/strategic/work_train.asp) is designed to address the need of long-term unemployed adults seeking workforce readiness training and industry relevant skills to support their reengagement in the workforce.
- **MASSGrant Plus Program** (<https://www.mass.edu/osfa/programs/massgrant.asp>) provides need-based financial assistance to undergraduate students who reside in Massachusetts.

Healthcare

- **Akwaaba Health Initiative** (<https://www.worcesterfreecare.org/akwaaba>) is to enhance access to health care and improve health outcomes for vulnerable populations in the city of Worcester.
- **Epworth Methodist Free Medical Program** (<https://www.worcesterfreecare.org/epworth>) to extend outreach and service to the greater Worcester community by providing a free medical services walk-in program for individuals and families who do not have or cannot afford health/medical insurance. Free dental service is also available.
- **India Society Worcester Free Health Stop** (<https://www.worcesterfreecare.org/imane>) provides acute care for non-emergency medical problems, information on health issues and different issues related to diet. Services will be provided to anyone regardless of their financial, immigration or insurance status. Services are not limited to the Indian Community. Free dental service is also available.
- **St. Anne's Free Medical Program** (<https://www.worcesterfreecare.org/stAnnes>) provides high-quality, respectful, and free medical care for the underserved population of Worcester County regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or ability to pay.
- **St. Peters Free Medical Program** (<https://www.worcesterfreecare.org/stPeters>) provide high-quality, respectful, and free medical care for the underserved population of Worcester County regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or ability to pay.
- **Worcester Islamic Center Social Services** (<https://www.worcesterfreecare.org/wicss>) provide basic quality health-care for poor, needy, and uninsured residents of Greater Worcester Area.
- **Wesley Eye and Ear Clinic** (<https://www.worcesterfreecare.org/eyeandear/>) offers free eye exams and hearing evaluations, and free or low-cost eyeglasses and hearing aids.
- **Quinsigamond Community College Dental Hygiene Clinic** (<https://www.qcc.edu/services/dental-hygiene-clinic>) provides valuable dental hygiene care at a fraction of the cost to those in the City of Worcester and surrounding regions. Veterans and active military can receive free services with a Military ID.

Leisure Activities

- **Card to Culture** programs offer people that receive support from the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and other organizations free or lowered cost access to cultural activities such as museums, musical or theatrical performances and **Mass Audubon** wildlife sanctuaries.
 - » **EBT Card to Culture:** ([EBT Card to Culture | Mass.gov](#))
 - » **The ConnectorCare Card to Culture** program ([ConnectorCare Card to Culture](#)): See the full list of participating organizations offering [ConnectorCare](#) discounts.
 - » **WIC Card to Culture:** The WIC Card to Culture program (<https://massculturalcouncil.org/organizations/card-to-culture/wic-card-to-culture/>), in partnership with Mass Cultural Council and the [Women, Infants & Children \(WIC\) Nutrition Program](#), gives WIC cardholders and their guests (up to 4 people total) free access to Mass Audubon wildlife sanctuaries. See the full list of participating organizations offering [WIC](#) discounts.
- **The Worcester Art Museum** has FREE admission to all visitors on the first Sunday of each month: 10am-4pm. [Learn more](#). Admission is free for EBT, WIC & ConnectorCare cardholders.

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