



BUILDING CONNECTIONS: HUNGER & MENTAL HEALTH

Access to affordable, nutritious food supports the foundation for optimal health and well-being throughout our lifecycle. The consumption of healthy food boosts the development of babies' brains and bodies, fuels children with the energy needed to excel in and out of school, buoys concentration and reduces the risk of chronic diseases in adults, and keeps seniors stable and independent. Lack of sufficient food does exactly the opposite—stunting growth, hindering education, swallowing motivation, slowing productivity and deteriorating one's health across the life spectrum, which includes emotional, psychological and social well-being.

Food insecurity—not knowing when or where you will get your next meal—is a pervasive issue that impacts people of all ages, backgrounds and zip codes, such as working adults, children, seniors and veterans who reside in rural, suburban and urban areas. It is estimated that nearly one in eight Coloradans face times where there is not enough money to buy food, whether due to a job loss, low wages, health issues or another misfortune. Those on a tight budget often have to choose between paying rent or buying needed medications instead of purchasing groceries. Such difficult circumstances and stressful decisions can contribute to depression, anxiety and a host of other issues related to one's mental health. These negative impacts can impede anyone from reaching their potential and fully contributing at every stage of life.

There is a growing body of research that not only examines hunger as a social determinant of general health but links hunger and adverse mental health outcomes. For example, studies have shown an association between food insecurity and the following: [higher risk for depression](#), [higher risk of suicide](#) and [behavioral problems amongst school-age children](#). Another national study also concludes that [mental health, by far, is the most expensive hunger-induced health problem](#) in the U.S., with a \$78.7-billion price tag.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Hunger Free Colorado operates a **statewide [Hunger Free Hotline](#) that connects Coloradans of all ages, backgrounds and zip codes to needed food resources**, such as food stamps, food pantries and meal sites. All calls are free, confidential and tailored to their needs and location. The nonprofit organization currently has an established referral system with several hospitals and medical clinics, which can be expanded to support those seeking or receiving mental/behavioral health care.

By fostering collaboration and employing innovative solutions, we can reduce barriers, better support those in need of resources, and further promote overall well-being and health for all Coloradans. **To learn more about partnership opportunities, call (720) 328-1284 or email info@hungerfreecolorado.org.**



Hunger Free Colorado, a statewide nonprofit organization launched in 2009, connects people to food resources and fuels change in policies, systems and social views, so no Coloradan goes hungry.

Fill up on information and take action at HungerFreeColorado.org.

