

Expanding Produce Rx: LC 7 One Pager

Our advocacy project aims to strengthen the Produce Rx program which provides low-income individuals with access to nutritious food through healthcare provider prescriptions. The current program allows eligible patients to receive \$30 per household member each month for fresh produce after visiting a healthcare provider. While this initiative has shown promise in improving health outcomes, it faces significant challenges that limit its effectiveness. We would like to focus on addressing these barriers to make the program more accessible and impactful.

One of the main issues with the current Produce Rx program is that the \$30 monthly prescription is insufficient, particularly for larger households. Since the program was first introduced in 2019, food prices have risen significantly, by approximately 25%, making it difficult for families to meet their nutritional needs with the current allocation. Increasing the monthly prescription to \$40 would help households better manage the higher cost of food, ensuring they can access fresh produce necessary for improved health.

Transportation poses another key challenge to food access for many of the low-income individuals served by Produce Rx. A significant portion of this population lives in food deserts, where access to grocery stores is limited. Without reliable transportation, even those eligible for the program struggle to redeem their prescriptions at eligible locations. We propose that the program include funding for transportation support, such as providing bus passes to participants. This would enable patients to more easily access grocery stores and also healthcare providers, increasing their ability to benefit from the program.

Furthermore, while the Produce Rx program has achieved success, particularly in improving outcomes for pregnant participants, its primary target population remains limited to individuals with specific health conditions, such as pregnancy or chronic diseases like diabetes. Expanding the program to include a broader range of participants would allow it to serve more people facing food insecurity and related health challenges. This expansion could help address the growing rates of chronic illness, pre-pregnancy obesity, and financial strain among low-income communities.

To implement these changes, we propose partnering with local healthcare providers, particularly Emergency Departments and primary care practices, to integrate Produce Rx prescriptions directly into the electronic medical record. This would streamline the process for physicians, making it easier to identify eligible patients and issue prescriptions. We also plan to collaborate with local grocery stores, such as Kroger, to secure financial support and donations to extend the program's resources.

By expanding Produce Rx, increasing the prescription budget, and addressing transportation barriers, we believe we can significantly reduce food insecurity in Cincinnati. These improvements will also enhance health outcomes by making fresh, nutritious food more accessible to low-income families, ultimately benefiting the broader community.