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UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP AIMS TO ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVE HEALTH
New Jersey's food banks and Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of NJ make multi-year commitment to "Growing Healthy Pantries"

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More than 175,000 children in New Jersey are food insecure, lacking consistent access to nutritious foods and other basic necessities that they need to grow up healthy.

Yesterday, New Jersey's five food banks – the Community FoodBank of New Jersey (CFBNJ), Food Bank of South Jersey, Fulfill, Mercer Street Friends, and NORWESCAP – partnered with Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey (Horizon) at an event to launch a new signature initiative, "Growing Healthy Pantries." This initiative is made possible by a \$200,000 investment from Horizon through its philanthropic arm, The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey, to help build the capacity of food pantries throughout the state and address the need for food distribution in New Jersey to focus on choice and nutrition.

The first phase of this 18-month pilot initiative will focus on the development of a toolkit to provide local pantries with the knowledge, resources and framework to develop nutrition policy, increase healthy food options and provide essential wrap-around services that address the factors that lead to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity. If the pilot phase is successful, phase two will focus on engaging other partners and funders and on spreading the model statewide.

"By focusing on health and choice, we can help our neighbors in need live active lives while affording them the dignity of being able to shop the way they would in a grocery store," said Carlos Rodriguez, President & CEO of the Community FoodBank of New Jersey. "New Jersey's food banks are grateful for the Horizon Foundation for New Jersey's partnership and commitment to addressing the social determinants of health."

"This exciting, new initiative with the Horizon Foundation of New Jersey goes boldly beyond building nutrition awareness," said Fred C. Wasiak, President & CEO of the Food Bank of South Jersey. "Together, we are empowering our neighbors throughout the state to create positive outcomes for healthier tomorrows."

"This year, Fulfill has committed to having 60 percent of the food we distribute to our pantries be either produce, protein, and dairy. We know that these foods are the ones most requested, and they are also the most nutritious and most expensive – which makes them the hardest to afford on a limited budget. All people should have access to these foods, so that their families are eating as healthy as possible," said Triada Stampas, President and CEO of Fulfill. "On behalf of Fulfill and our pantry network, I applaud Horizon Foundation for supporting this work as a statewide initiative so that it reaches all our neighbors in need."

"In a very special way, food brings people together. Food banks and pantries do more than provide nutrition. Mercer Street Friends' food bank opens doors that allow us to coordinate comprehensive supports for students and provide resources for parents," said Courtney Matlock, Mercer Street Friends' Chief Development and Marketing Officer. "The

Growing Healthy Pantries initiative is a commitment to building stronger NJ families. Horizon is an important partner in achieving health equity by leveling the playing field with respect to increasing opportunities for healthy living.”

Food bank leaders and representatives from The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey spoke at the event, introducing “Growing Healthy Pantries” and its goals to attendees. Research shows that people living in food insecure households struggle to access nutritious food and face barriers to the consistent adoption of healthy eating patterns. New Jersey’s food banks are in a unique position to address the link between food insecurity and health, and although a focus on hunger as a health issue isn’t new to hunger-relief organizations, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the connection between hunger and health into even sharper focus. The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on historically underserved and under-resourced communities that also experience higher rates of nutrition-related diseases, like diabetes. Through “Growing Healthy Pantries” the organizations are joining forces to make an unprecedented commitment to promote greater health equity.

“A healthier New Jersey starts with good and healthy food. The tens of thousands of New Jerseyans who rely on the nearly 1,000 food pantries across the state that are served by these five food banks will now have new resources, information, and tools to help them become healthier and more food secure,” said Jonathan R. Pearson, Horizon’s Director of Corporate Social Responsibility and the Executive Director of The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey. “This is truly an example of a partnership in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Through Growing Healthy Pantries, we are bringing together the organizations that have been at the forefront of feeding New Jersey and New Jersey’s largest and most trusted health insurer to magnify the impact we have, improve food security, and promote greater health equity.”

[Click here to view a video of the event.](#)

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ABOUT THE COMMUNITY FOODBANK OF NEW JERSEY

[The Community FoodBank of New Jersey \(CFBNJ\)](#), a member of Feeding America®, has been delivering food, help, and hope across the state for more than 45 years. Last year, CFBNJ provided nutritious food for over 85 million meals through its network of more than 800 community partners including pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, mobile pantries, and child and senior feeding programs throughout the 15 New Jersey counties it serves. For our hungry neighbors, the Community FoodBank of New Jersey is the powerful agent of change that fills the emptiness caused by hunger and provides resources that are essential to earning a sustainable living.

ABOUT THE FOOD BANK OF SOUTH JERSEY

The Food Bank of South Jersey believes that no one should go to bed hungry. Since 1985, it has served the children, families and seniors of Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Salem counties by distributing safe and healthy food, providing nutrition education and cooking courses, and developing sustainable pathways for neighbors to improve their lives. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and member of Feeding America, FBSJ distributed nearly 15 million meals in 2021, through direct distributions and its network of more than 200 partner agencies. Help end hunger in South Jersey. Visit FoodBankSJ.org.

ABOUT FULFILL FOOD BANK

Fulfill has been providing food for families at the Jersey Shore for more than thirty years. We supply over 972,000 meals per month by distributing food to nearly 300 feeding agencies in Monmouth and Ocean Counties, including soup kitchens, food pantries, and shelters, and by delivering food to families, children, seniors, veterans, and more.

Fulfill also offers a suite of programs to connect people to the resources they need to become self-sufficient. Our team assists with applications for SNAP, affordable health care, and Medicaid. They also help with affordable housing applications, budgeting and money management, utility expenses, and senior services. To learn more about our programs or how to get involved, visit www.fulfillnj.org.

ABOUT MERCER STREET FRIENDS

As a Quaker-affiliated, nonsectarian 501(c)(3) organization, Mercer Street Friends is dedicated to nourishing minds and bodies, empowering families and communities by providing comprehensive programs to address poverty and the physical and emotional trauma it creates for children, families and the community. Our programs focus on: food, families and education.

As the primary source of government and privately donated food, Mercer Street Friends Food Bank leads the community response to hunger in Mercer County. In 2020, the Food Bank channeled more than 5.5 million pounds of food to a network of more than 100 food pantries, shelters, school districts, soup kitchens, meal sites, senior centers, programs for the disabled and low-income housing sites. Throughout the year, Mercer Street Friends served over 100,000 individuals, providing 50,000 weekend Community Food Bags, totaling 800,000 weekend meals to families throughout the County.

ABOUT NORWESCAP

Norwescap provides vital and life-sustaining services to over 30,000 individuals and families in need in Northwest New Jersey. Our programs include strategies that address the critical areas of education, health and wellness, employment, housing, volunteerism and financial empowerment. Since our inception, we have been dedicated to achieving the mission of creating opportunities to transform lives through innovative programs and partnerships. For more information, please visit www.norwescap.org.

ABOUT THE HORIZON FOUNDATION FOR NEW JERSEY

The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey is the philanthropic arm of Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey. Its mission is to make New Jersey healthier by supporting non-profit organizations that expand access to health care, remove barriers to good health and increase opportunities for everyone to live the healthiest life possible, no matter who they are or where they live. Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey and The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. For more information, please visit HZNFoundation.org.