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**Maine Medical Partners Pediatrics Takes on Hunger**

*Pediatricians to screen for food insecurity and connect patients with resources*

**PORTLAND, ME (April 5, 2018)** — As a result of a partnership with the Preble Street Maine Hunger Initiative (MHI), pediatric primary care practices with Maine Medical Partners (MMP) now have the ability to screen for food insecurity and refer patients to resources to relieve hunger. The “Hunger Vital Sign” has been incorporated into MMP’s electronic health record system and is starting to be implemented into practice workflows.

Developed by Children’s HealthWatch and endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Hunger Vital Sign allows physicians to screen patients quickly for food insecurity and intervene with appropriate referrals. Patients screening positive for food insecurity will be connected with USDA Federal Nutrition Programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and local charitable food programs providing plentiful, healthy food options for families. “Many Maine families struggle with hunger, and the effects on children can be profound,” said MHI Program Manager Michelle Lamm. “This is a powerful step to ensuring food insecure families have regular access to healthy meal options.”

“Maine has the third highest rate of food insecurity in the country,” says Julia Bergquist, a social work student interning at MMP – Westbrook Pediatrics. “It is estimated that 20-25 percent of children in Maine meet the definition of food insecure.\*” Children living in food insecure homes are more susceptible to health problems including anemia, asthma, obesity and mental health issues, and are more likely to struggle in school and exhibit behavioral problems. When children have access to healthy, nutritious meals, they have a greater chance for social-emotional growth and academic success.

“We began asking these two AAP-endorsed food insecurity questions in our Westbrook pediatric practice in late January and have already identified a half-dozen families that were in need,” said Brian Youth, M.D., pediatrician at MMP – Westbrook Pediatrics. “It was gratifying to be able to not only identify this issue, but give a family some tools to seek immediate help by providing information on SNAP benefits before they even left the office.”

Maine Hunger Initiative and Maine Medical Partners look forward to an ongoing collaboration to increase the training of providers on this screening tool and to refer more families at risk for food insecurity to programs in our state that can help.

\*Good Shepherd Food Bank and Preble Street. (February 2017). Research Report: Hunger Pains. Accessed at [www.preblestreet.org/wp-content/uploads/Hunger-Pains-Final-Report-February-2017-4.pdf](http://www.preblestreet.org/wp-content/uploads/Hunger-Pains-Final-Report-February-2017-4.pdf)

**Maine Medical Partners** is the largest network of primary care and specialty practices in Maine with more than 50 practice and outreach locations across Maine and New Hampshire. Maine Medical Partners is a department of Maine Medical Center and a member of the MaineHealth system, a growing family of health care services in northern New England. For more information, visit [www.mainemedicalpartners.org](http://www.mainemedicalpartners.org).

**Maine Hunger Initiative** is a Preble Street program working to increase access to USDA federal nutrition programs, support the charitable food system, and advocate for long-term solutions to end hunger in Maine. [www.preblestreet.org/maine-hunger-initiative](http://www.preblestreet.org/maine-hunger-initiative)

**Preble Street** is a nonprofit social work agency serving the most vulnerable people in Maine since 1975 through innovative, best-practice, client-centered programs that respond to and prevent hunger and homelessness. In addition to the largest emergency food service program in northern New England, Preble Street operates 14 low-barrier programs throughout Maine providing 24/365 services for individuals and families living in poverty, including homeless youth, women, veterans, and victims of human trafficking, driven by its mission to meet urgent needs, empower people to move beyond the crises in their lives, and advocate for solutions to homelessness, hunger, and poverty. [www.preblestreet.org](http://www.preblestreet.org)

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