

HEALTH, NEWS

\$2 MILLION FEEDS GLSS PHOENIX FOOD HUB

Mass General Brigham provides grant

BY ANTHONY CAMMALLERI | August 14, 2022



The Greater Lynn Senior Services' Phoenix Food Hub plans to use \$2 million in funding from Mass General Brigham Hospital for data collection, kitchen renovation, and a variety of programs that aim to combat food insecurity. (Item File Photo)

LYNN — The Greater Lynn Senior Services' Phoenix Food Hub plans to use \$2 million in funding from Mass General Brigham Hospital for data collection, kitchen renovation, and a variety of programs that aim to combat food insecurity.

The Phoenix Food Hub, located at 8 Silsbee St., had a mini-launch with The Food Project's winter farmer's market in January. Since then, Public Health Coordinator and Food Security Task Force Leader Norris Guscott said that only 10 percent of the Phoenix Food Hub has been open.

Guscott said the Food Security Task Force's success with community garden projects was likely what caught Mass General Brigham's attention.

"We're able to expand garden programs. Even now, the work that was done there attracted about \$2 million in investment from Mass General programs. That's what's spearheading Phoenix food hub now, which is a one-stop food hub," Guscott said.

The COVID-19 pandemic gave the public a newfound interest in the social determinants of health, which, he said, brought attention to the expansion of programs like the Phoenix Food Hub, Guscott said.

"There'll be a nurse dietitian, a state-of-the-art teaching kitchen, and multiple community partners having programming there [...] lots of things were really pouring from the pandemic, also going back to the focus on social determinants of health," he said.

Through the Phoenix Food Hub, the Health Department plans to launch a data system that allows officials to track food insecurity throughout the city.

"We also want to streamline the patient referral system or be able to be better at identifying food insecure patients and we also want to figure out a way to tie in the other social determinants, because it's kind of funny talking about food, if you're housing insecure, or if you've got other clinical issues. What's to come is just streamlining a lot of things," Guscott said. "There's lots of really bold things that we want to nail down and make sure that they're working right."

"What we're talking about now is a data system that captures clinical and social data ... and that's going to be used to inform decisions here. Like if the mayor wants to know questions about food, use it for grant money, a variety of different things," he continued.

Public Health Director Michelle Desmarais said that GLSS was already renovating the hub's kitchen before the money from Mass General Brigham came in. She said the hub will likely open in October.

In January, Chief Executive Officer of GLSS Kathryn C. Burns said that even though the Phoenix Food Hub is located at the site of the old Senior Center, it's intended to be used by people of all ages.

"It's for all ages, not just the elderly," Burns said. "It's just such a fantastic opportunity to collaborate across the city for something that's so important and really not just food, but a whole lot of things that we call the social determinants of health. That's not only food, but also housing, education, feeling safe, and those sorts of things."

Anthony Cammalleri can be reached at anthony@itemlive.com