U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Office of Rural Health
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ORH PROJECT OVERVIEW

Prescription CSA Share for Rural Veterans with Chronic Disease

Background

Fruit and vegetable intake has been shown to improve health, yet less than 20% of Vermonters were meeting the recommended intake in 2009. Rural Veterans associated with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) White River Junction Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) may be at higher risk for low fruit and vegetable consumption due to living in rural locations with reduced access to affordable fresh produce. These Veterans may also be in a lower socioeconomic status and the cost of produce may be a barrier to consumption. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs have been shown to increase vegetable intake of participants. Barriers to joining a CSA program include cost, access, lack of knowledge, skill level, and confidence with what to do with the produce.

Goals and Objectives

The purpose of the VHA Office of Rural Health (ORH) Veterans Rural Health Resource Center-White River Junction project, *Prescription CSA Share for Rural Veterans with Chronic Disease*, is to provide free produce to rural Veterans to support increased consumption by improving access, building skills and confidence, and supporting dietary behavior change.

Objectives:

1. To provide a weekly box of produce, at no cost, to Veterans with diet related chronic disease or food insecurity, for 17 weeks during the summer and fall.
2. Expand to reach Veterans in Newport, Littleton, and Central Vermont.
3. Weekly virtual cooking class will be offered weekly, and recording will be available for participants to view on their own time.
4. Participating Veterans will complete pre and post questionnaires assessing their dietary habits.
5. Intake of fruits and vegetables will increase by at least 2 servings per week.
6. Participant confidence on vegetable preparation will increase.

Methodology

This project is coordinated between the White River Junction VA Medical Center (VAMC), including associated CBOC's, and the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC). Participating Veterans are provided with the registration form and be added to the secure spreadsheet of participants. Completed questionnaires are collected and securely stored by the project lead and program support assistant. Data are uploaded electronically to the VYCC site.

Veterans are provided the CSA pick up dates and times, along with supporting materials for how to prepare for their share. CSA deliveries start in July and run for 17 weeks. Veterans are offered a weekly virtual class by the VHA dietitian to learn about how to use and prepare their vegetables. At the end of 17 weeks, post questionnaires are completed and returned to the VA research assistant. VYCC has provided standardized instruments to use for the registration and questionnaires. Participants complete the Health Care Share registration form prior to the start of the program.

Impact on Rural Veteran Health

Research supports the correlation between fruit and vegetable intake and obesity and chronic disease. As of 2009, only 17.9% of the Vermont population was consuming the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables. CSA has been proposed as a solution to this problem, yet low-income populations often cannot afford the up-front cost of a CSA. The VHA has collaborated with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corporation (VYCC) on the Health Care Share Program. The program has grown from serving 20 patients 100 and has spread across 3 locations. This project targets Veterans with at least 1 risk factor for diet related chronic disease (DM, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity) or food insecurity. The VHA provider prescribes the Health Care Share, free of cost to the Veteran, for 17 weeks. The Veteran picks up their Health Care Share bag weekly at a VAMC, VSO clinic/organization, or designated healthcare facility. VHA and VYCC staff provide support on how to store, prepare, and consume the produce. Participants are provided with recipes and a virtual demo or cook-along cooking class with a VHA dietitian throughout the duration of the program, along with a weekly newsletter from VYCC.

Key Takeaways

This project provides Veterans with diet related chronic disease or food insecurity, with a free weekly CSA share of vegetables for 17 weeks during the summer and fall, accompanied by a virtual cooking class.

- Fruit and vegetables intake has been shown to improve health, yet less than 20% of Vermonters are meeting the recommended intake.
- Rural Veterans associated with the WRJ VA may be at higher risk for low produce consumption due to reduced access to affordable fresh produce.
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs have been shown to increase vegetable intake of participants.
- Barriers to joining a CSA program include cost, access, lack of knowledge, skill level, and confidence with what to do with the produce.

References

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