



Abstract Title: Drug-free prescription programs in Halifax: Environmental scan and preliminary recommendations

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Background

Food insecurity continues to be a prevalent and highly impactful concern for many Canadians. Between 2007 and 2014 Nova Scotia has consistently trended above the national food insecurity average (12%), where in 2014 15.4% of NS households reported as being food insecure (Tarasuk, Mitchell, & Dachner, 2014; Stats Canada, 2017). Over the last decade, several programs targeting food insecurity have emerged in North America - one such model being the drug-free prescription program. The commonality between these programs is that patients identified as at risk for food insecurity are “prescribed”, by health professionals, to a source of healthy affordable food.

Purpose and Approach

This environmental scan examines a sample of food prescription programs in the USA and explores several Canadian initiatives targeting food insecurity. From this, we have developed preliminary recommendations for the potential establishment of such programs in Halifax, NS.

Outcomes

While the USA has several established food prescription programs, there is minimal evidence of such programming in Canada. We examined Wholesome Wave (several states), Food Rx (Chicago), Fresh Prescription (Detroit), and Fresh Farmacy (Virginia) in the USA. Canadian healthy food voucher programs included in this scan are the Farmer’s Market Nutrition Coupon Program (BC), the Nutrition Coupon Program (PEI), and a proposed pilot for FoodFit Family (ON, AB, NS). By reviewing the successes and challenges of existing programs, we suggest several preliminary recommendations for implementing food prescription programs in the future:

- Focus on partner recruitment and continued open communication between program partners.
- Engage key stakeholders to identify community needs.
- Extend program benefits to the patient’s household.
- Implement a sufficient financial incentive (vouchers, coupons) to encourage program participation.

- Provide adequate orientation and training to participating health providers.
- Reduce burden on participating health providers as much as possible.
- Seek and secure funding through government sources, partner programs, grants, and donations.
- Program evaluation is vital to assessment of efficacy, patient outcomes, and the identification of areas of improvement.

Conclusion

Access to healthy fruits and vegetables may be limited by physical inaccessibility, affordability, and lack of knowledge surrounding healthy food choices (Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Ontario, 2009). Drug-free prescription programs focusing on increasing access to affordable health foods are well established in the United States, but we have not yet observed the same effect in Canada. Through this environmental scan we have developed preliminary recommendations for the potential establishment of a prescription program in Halifax, NS.

References

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Cite this document in APA:

Wentzell, M. (2018, September). *Drug-free prescription programs in Halifax: Environmental scan and preliminary recommendations*. Paper presented at the Healthy Living, Healthy Life: Collaborative Health Conference on Research, Practice and Community Innovations Conference, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS. Retrieved from <https://ojs.library.dal.ca/HLHL/>

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