

## 52 Ways YOU Can Help Change The Story About Hunger and Increase Food Security In Our Community

For decades, the focus of efforts to end hunger in the United States has been on feeding the immediate need of people who are hungry today. That's what has built the system of food banks, food pantries, and community meals as well as programs like SNAP (formerly known as Food Stamps). Feeding the immediate need is crucial, but until we address the root causes of poverty and hunger, we won't be able to "shorten the line" of people at those food pantries and meal programs who are food insecure. To address food security in our community, we need to work to both feed the need AND shorten the line. Hunger does not exist in a vacuum... people are hungry because their jobs don't pay a living wage, or too much of their income goes to pay for housing, medical care, heat, transportation and other basic living expenses. To shorten the line, we need to address some of these root causes of poverty and hunger.

**Here are MANY ways that YOU can help change the story about hunger and work to increase food security in our community, including actions you can take to address root causes of hunger.**

### STRATEGIES TO HELP SHORTEN THE LINE: LISTEN TO OUR HUNGRY NEIGHBORS

1. **Listen to the experiences of people who have experienced food insecurity.** What led them to needing food assistance? What helped them come to a place where they no longer needed such assistance? What would have prevented them from needing such help in the first place? Take this information and **act on it!** Advocate for public policy or organize with your community to make the changes that they suggest.
2. **Have dinner at a community meal.** Meet your neighbors who eat there regularly. Talk to them, get to know them as *people*. By sharing a meal, we establish community, and we begin to break down the "us vs. them" dynamic at the heart of the stigma surrounding food insecurity.

### STRATEGIES TO HELP SHORTEN THE LINE: AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

3. Support organizations that are working to **increase access to high-quality, affordable child care and early education.** The cost of child care is a significant obstacle maintaining employment for many parents. For more information about affordable child care, visit <http://children.massbudget.org/income-eligible-child-care-child-care-access>.

Two groups that are actively working on this issue are Put MA Kids First (<http://www.putmakidsfirst.org/>) and Kids Count, which is part of the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center. More information on Kids Count is available at <http://www.massbudget.org/kids.php>.

4. Help low income working families with young children by advocating to state legislators to **increase the state Head Start line item.** Last year over 8,500 children enrolled in Head Start programs throughout the state. You can find more info about Head Start funding at <http://children.massbudget.org/grants-head-start-programs>.

### STRATEGIES TO HELP SHORTEN THE LINE: TRANSPORTATION

5. Support organizations that are working to **increase funding for Regional Transit Authorities**, so that our neighbors can have consistent transportation to and from work, as well as to food access locations such as grocery stores, farmers markets, and food pantries. Transportation Justice for Franklin County Mass (<https://www.facebook.com/TJusticeFC/>) and Transportation for Massachusetts (<https://www.t4ma.org>) are both actively working on transportation issues.
6. Work with Regional Transit Authorities to **make sure transit routes include grocery stores and food pantries.**

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7. **Bag limits on public transit** can be a real barrier to those who rely on public transportation to get to and from the grocery store. Imagine having to ride the bus for over an hour to get to a grocery store, and then only being able to carry home two bags of groceries on your way back! Imagine you have children, and those two bags of food will only last you a couple of days before you have to make the trip again. If your local Transit Authority has limits on the number of bags passengers can carry, work with your neighbors to encourage them to raise those limits.
8. Engage PVTA and FRTA in the Hunger Task Force as members/partners who help to make group decisions, not just external partners who make charitable “donations.” Make sure they understand what strategies help to shorten the line vs. feed the need.

#### **STRATEGIES TO HELP SHORTEN THE LINE: AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE**

9. Support organizations working to **address the high cost of health care**. Health insurance premiums and deductibles eat into many families budgets, leaving less money available for other necessities such as housing, food, and transportation.

One organization working on this issue is Mass-Care, which is working to create a single-payer health care system (commonly referred to as “Medicare for All”) in Massachusetts. Learn more about Mass-Care and the single-payer model at [www.masscare.org](http://www.masscare.org). Another group organizing around this issue is Western Mass Medicare for All. Visit <https://www.wmmedicareforall.org/>.

10. Encourage your local healthcare providers to start **screening for food insecurity** - there’s a simple, **two-question screening tool** that can be found online here: <https://bit.ly/2qllnPn>. If patients screen positive for food insecurity indicators, healthcare professionals can refer them to existing services, such as SNAP enrollment assistance or local food pantries. Or...
11. Poor health can be a driver of poverty, both due to a person’s inability to work and because of the high cost of health care. Improving a person’s diet can have a dramatic impact on their health (and thus reduce health care costs and improve their ability to work), but lack of knowledge about how to prepare food at home can be a significant barrier.

**Support inclusion of “home economics” in elementary and secondary school curricula**, and support organizations that work to improve nutrition education and cooking skill-building opportunities in low-income communities.

One organization doing this kind of work is Share our Strength, through their “Cooking Matters” program. You can learn more about their work at [www.shareourstrength.org](http://www.shareourstrength.org).

Another organization working on this is Just Roots, which offers cooking demonstrations and food samples, along with two weekly recipes that pair with their CSA farm share program. Members get to build their own cookbook throughout the growing/harvest season, ending the year with 40+ recipes. [www.justroots.org](http://www.justroots.org)

#### **STRATEGIES TO HELP SHORTEN THE LINE: AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

12. Support organizations that are working to **increase access to affordable housing**. Like health care costs, the high cost of housing is another financial strain on many households, yet there are not enough housing vouchers

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available for everyone that needs them. This means that some families remain on the waitlist for a voucher for years before receiving one. In the meantime, families pay more than they can afford for housing, leaving less money available for other necessities, like food.

- a. Citizens' Housing and Planning Association is a statewide organization mission is "to encourage the production and preservation of housing that is affordable to low and moderate income families and individuals and to foster diverse and sustainable communities through planning and community developments." [www.chapa.org](http://www.chapa.org)
- b. Interfaith Council of Franklin County's Housing Committee is actively working to address this need locally. Those interested in joining this effort can email [interfaithcfc@gmail.com](mailto:interfaithcfc@gmail.com)
- c. Get involved locally. Find out if your city or town has an affordable housing committee or partnership. If it does not, talk to other community members about starting one. Talk to your local officials about affordable housing and what your community can do to build more.

### STRATEGIES TO HELP SHORTEN THE LINE: TAKE POLITICAL ACTION

13. **Vote to End Hunger** by pledging to support candidates who make ending hunger and poverty a priority. Educate your family, friends, and neighbors about who these legislators are. Learn more at [www.votetoendhunger.org](http://www.votetoendhunger.org).
14. If you've experienced food insecurity, **speak up!** The folks in charge of making the rules for anti-hunger programs like SNAP, who decide on things like minimum wage, and transportation funding, etc. need to hear from YOU about YOUR experiences and how these policies have impacted or will impact YOUR LIFE! Find out who your legislators are at [www.wheredoivotema.com](http://www.wheredoivotema.com).
15. Join the **Franklin County Resource Network's "Hunger Task Force"** to continue working on these ideas! Contact Justin Costa ([jcosta@communityaction.us](mailto:jcosta@communityaction.us)) at Community Action of the Pioneer Valley for more information about how to join.
16. Advocate to your state legislators in supporting **The Fair Share Amendment**, a legislative amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution that would create a 4% surtax on annual individual income above one million dollars and direct this new revenue toward investments in education and transportation. <https://www.raiseupma.org/campaigns/fair-share-amendment/>
17. Advocate for a **national jobs program**, similar to the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression, to offer job training and opportunities for jobs that pay at least a living way for anyone who wants to work. Such a program could focus on transportation or energy infrastructure at the national, state, or local level. The Center for Budget & Policy Priorities has a proposal for a federal jobs program, which you can read online at <https://www.cbpp.org/research/full-employment/the-federal-job-guarantee-a-policy-to-achieve-permanent-full-employment>. The Pacific Standard also has a write-up of the impact a federal jobs guarantee might have on the broader economy, which you can read online at <https://psmag.com/economics/the-impacts-of-a-federal-jobs-guarantee>.
18. **Update the federal poverty guidelines** to more accurately reflect the real cost of living, and include adjustments for geographic differences. The current federal poverty calculation was developed in the 1960s, and the formula hasn't changed since then, despite dramatic shifts in household spending to cover necessities like clothing and transportation. It is used to set eligibility guidelines for a variety of federal assistance programs. Updating the formula would result in expanded access to federal benefits like SNAP and WIC, because more people would qualify for benefits. The federal poverty level is calculated by the office of Health and Human Services.

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19. Shift the narrative of food access issues in our community from being a human need to a human right. This December, reflect on the 70th anniversary of the adoption of **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, by striking up a conversation on the significance of Article 25, which states:

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Add your voice to the United Nations video campaign and record yourself reading an article from the declaration. <https://www.un.org/en/udhr-video>

20. Advocate for **full-service kitchens in schools** (new or renovated). This will increase access to nutritious school meals.

21. Join the Rise and Shine Coalition to **advocate for Breakfast After the Bell** in high-poverty school systems across Massachusetts. Moving breakfast after the starting bell increases access and improves participation in school breakfast programs, ensuring that ALL students start the school day ready to learn. Visit <http://riseandshinema.org/> to learn more.

22. **Advocate for a national increase to the minimum wage**, and a restructuring of **hourly vs. salary rules (defining who is exempt from certain wage and hour laws and who isn't)** to reduce abuse and exploitation of wage and hour loopholes.

In July, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the "Raise the Wage Act," which would raise the federal minimum wage to \$15/hr by 2024 and tie future increases to median wage growth. However, the Senate is unlikely to take up the bill, and President Trump has indicated he would veto the bill if it ever makes it to his desk. Learn how you can take action at <https://raisetheminimumwage.com/fight-for-15/>.

23. Sign up for **Advocacy Alerts from The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts** by going to [www.foodbankwma.org/get-involved/advocate](http://www.foodbankwma.org/get-involved/advocate). They'll let you know when there are opportunities to contact your legislators about important legislation.

Other organizations that have advocacy alerts on hunger issues include the MA Food System Collaborative ([www.mafoodsystem.org](http://www.mafoodsystem.org)), Project Bread ([www.projectbread.org](http://www.projectbread.org)), Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center ([www.massbudget.org](http://www.massbudget.org)), Massachusetts Public Health Association (<http://mapublichealth.org>), and Raise Up Massachusetts ([www.raiseupma.org](http://www.raiseupma.org)). Sign up for email alerts and engage!

#### **STRATEGIES TO HELP SHORTEN THE LINE: HELP WORKING FAMILIES ACHIEVE FINANCIAL WELLNESS**

24. Help working families and bring over a million dollars into your community by volunteering for the **VITA Free Tax Assistance Program**, which helps taxpayers with lower incomes maximize their tax refunds or reduce their taxes due. Franklin and Hampshire County residents can visit <https://www.communityaction.us/taxes>. Hampden County residents can find out more at <https://www.uwpv.org/financial-wellness>. Berkshire County residents can go to <https://bcacinc.org/departments/Community-Programming/page/asset-development.html> for more info.

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25. If you work or volunteer at a public-facing organization, spread the word about financial wellness services like the THRIVE Program at United Way of Pioneer Valley, which provides one-on-one financial coaching to help people become more financially stable. These programs work with low-income people to set and work toward financial goals by teaching about budgeting, savings, debt, and credit scores. Lots of times they'll even refer to other resources such as food pantries, legal aid, and employment services. If you work at a library or human service organization, you could invite them to come give a presentation or workshop on a given topic. Read more on UWPV's THRIVE program at <https://www.uwpv.org/thrive>.

#### STRATEGIES TO HELP SHORTEN THE LINE: CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

26. Work for **criminal justice reform**, especially around **racism in the criminal justice system**. Even though they do not commit crimes at a higher rate, people of color are more likely to be convicted and be incarcerated. Upon release, a criminal record makes it difficult to find a job and disqualifies former inmates from certain government benefits. This, in turn, means former prisoners are more likely to be food insecure. Additionally, if the incarcerated individual is a parent, their spouse/partner/co-parent/guardian and the child are more likely to be food insecure during the parents' incarceration.

#### STRATEGIES TO HELP SHORTEN THE LINE: LIVING WAGES/ECONOMIC JUSTICE

27. **If you're an employer, work toward providing living wages for your employees.** Talk to other employers who have been able to do so, and ask what they did to get there.
28. Publicly **recognize employers who pay living wages.**
29. Organize to raise **minimum wage** at the local level.
30. **Compensate "invisible/unpaid work"** like housekeeping and caregiving, especially for those who do this work full-time, or are unable to work because of these unpaid responsibilities (ex. caring full-time for an elderly relative, or part-time care for a chronically ill or disabled child).

Some existing programs compensate family members who provide care for veterans, elderly or disabled family members. In most states, Medicaid will provide some financial support for family caregiving, as will some health and life insurance policies that include long-term care. SeniorLink.com has a list of programs providing financial compensation for family caregivers, including state-by-state information. You can find that list online at <https://tinyurl.com/v2f59j5>. You can find information on programs in Massachusetts at <https://www.mass.gov/topics/caregiving>.

Expansion of eligibility and benefits for these programs would assist families coping with the financial burden of necessary caregiving for a loved one... a financial burden that may be a contributing factor to food insecurity.

31. Support universal basic income (UBI), which supporters say will increase economic security (and thereby reduce food insecurity) by providing additional financial resources to households for basic expenses.

The Atlantic has a great YouTube video explaining UBI, which you can view at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnWsPIgl8\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnWsPIgl8_s). There are even some trials happening, including one in Stockton, CA, which you can read about at <https://tinyurl.com/y2t3f2xz>. Give Directly is also a great resource for information about UBI, including arguments for and against, and a list of proposals and current trials, available at <https://www.givedirectly.org/basic-income/>.

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One organization that is working on UBI at a policy level is Basic Income Action: <https://www.basicincomeaction.org/>. Their website offers several ways to get involved, and they have a Massachusetts chapter. You can find the MA chapter's Facebook page at <https://tinyurl.com/ur3y9vh>.

32. Shift the conversation about why people are hungry - it's not just a lack of income or a lack of transportation or other resources that keep people from accessing the food they need... it's about **economic justice!**

### STRATEGIES TO HELP FEED THE IMMEDIATE NEED

33. **Increase awareness of food access resources such as pantries and meals.**

Keep a list of food access resources on hand and post it at your workplace, place of worship, local library, and other places where people in your community gather. Get a printable PDF of programs in Franklin County at: [www.foodbankwma.org/get-help/locate-a-local-feeding-program](http://www.foodbankwma.org/get-help/locate-a-local-feeding-program).

34. Increase awareness of non-food resources and benefits, such as fuel assistance, tax prep assistance, where and how to apply for housing assistance or subsidized childcare programs, etc. These resources can be shared in the same places and in the same manner as food access resources, listed above.

35. **Support and increase awareness of income-accessible CSA farm shares.**

Community Supported Agriculture Farm Shares are a way that farmers sell their products to people in their community. People buy a share, and receive farm products over a period of time. Local non-profit organizations such as Just Roots in Greenfield offer reduced price shares for qualifying low-income households. They have the largest low-income CSA program in Massachusetts. Donating to nonprofits such as Just Roots 501c3s that not only give away food through donation programs, but enable affordable food through subsidies and provide wrap around support is another way to help in this effort to address hunger. Learn more about Just Roots' CSA program at <http://justroots.org/farm/csa-farm-shares/>.

36. **Promote use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) and the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP).** HIP provides a dollar-for-dollar match for SNAP recipients who purchase fresh fruits and vegetables through participating farmers markets, farm stands, CSAs and Mobile Markets. Learn more about HIP at [www.mafoodsystem.org/projects/HIP](http://www.mafoodsystem.org/projects/HIP). Post this information at your workplace, place of worship, local library, and other places where people in your community gather.

37. Visit [www.coalitiontoendhunger.org](http://www.coalitiontoendhunger.org) to hear stories from people in our community who have experienced food insecurity. Then share the website with your friends on social media.

38. **Volunteer at your local pantry or meal program.** You can find a program near you at [www.foodbankwma.org/get-help/locate-a-local-feeding-program](http://www.foodbankwma.org/get-help/locate-a-local-feeding-program).

39. Work to **increase access to community gardens**, especially for people at risk of food insecurity. This could mean a new community garden in a low-income housing development, or reduced rates for garden plots for low-income community garden members. Growing your own food is empowering, builds community, and increases fruit and vegetable consumption!

One organization already working on community garden access is Just Roots, which manages the Greenfield Community Farm and offers more than 60 garden plots. Sizes vary and pricing for plots are affordable (some as low as \$0). Gardeners have access to community tools, water and resources as well as monthly gatherings and a newsletter. <http://justroots.org/farm/community-garden/>

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40. Are you fluent in another language? Help reduce language barriers to food access by offering to **translate materials for your local pantry or meal site!**
41. Consider **donating** to any of the organizations mentioned on this sheet!  
In Franklin County, The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, Stone Soup Cafe, Community Action of the Pioneer Valley, Franklin County Community Meals Program, Franklin Area Survival Center, Just Roots, and the Hilltown Churches Food Pantries are all doing direct-service anti-hunger work in our community - if you want your financial support to go directly to people who need food today, these organizations are great options!
42. If you know someone who is homebound, offer to give them a **ride to the grocery store**, or to a pantry or local community meal.
43. If you have a vehicle and time to volunteer, talk to your local pantry about **delivering to members of the community who are homebound...**
44. Or talk to your local human service organizations (ex. senior centers, recovery centers, subsidized child care centers, etc.) about **providing rides to the food pantry** for their patrons.
45. **Encourage your local food pantry to extend their hours** to include evenings and weekends - ask what they need to make that happen (do they need volunteers? additional food donations or drivers to pick up donations?), and see what you can do to help them get there!
46. **Start a food pantry at your doctor's office, local community health center, or hospital.** This doesn't have to be a big space - just a locked cabinet can be enough. This can be stocked through donations from staff or community food drives. Learn more about how the healthcare community can get involved in fighting food insecurity here: <https://bit.ly/2qlInPn>
47. **Get parents involved in nutrition and cooking education!** Are there organizations in your community who have facilities to offer family cooking classes? Are you involved in a Girl Scout or Boy Scout troop that you could teach cooking to, or could you arrange for a nutrition specialist to speak to the troop?
48. Get involved in supporting and advocating for **urban agriculture!** This includes community gardens, or backyard, balcony, or rooftop gardens. Learn more about urban agriculture at <https://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/urban-agriculture>.
49. **Buy a copy of "Good and Cheap: Eat Well on \$4/Day" by Leanne Brown.** It's got LOTS of great recipes and ideas for healthy, cost-efficient meals, and for every book sold, one book is donated to someone in need. You could also buy multiple copies and donate them directly to your local pantry, meal site, or homeless shelter. Find out more at <https://www.leannebrown.com/>.
50. **Encourage/organize farmers to sell locally** at farmers markets, farm stands, and mobile markets, and encourage them to **accept SNAP and HIP** as a way to increase their sales and make their produce more income-accessible.
51. Do you own or work at a **restaurant or grocery store?** Talk to the managers of these businesses to encourage them to **donate excess food products to food pantries and meal sites** in your community.

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Many businesses worry about liability, but you can let them know that they're protected by the **Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act**, which ensures that businesses who give food in good faith to charitable organizations won't be liable if someone gets sick. Food pantries and community meals also have staff who are trained in food safety, so they know how to handle food safely so no one gets sick. More info on the **Good Samaritan Food Donation Act** can be found at: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/partners/become-a-product-partner/food-partners>

There are also a number of existing food rescue organizations that you could encourage store owners (and your local food pantries and meal sites) to participate in, or which you could volunteer for yourself. Some of these include Rachel's Table (<https://rachelstablespringfield.org/>), Lovin' Spoonfuls (<https://lovinspoonfulsinc.org/>), or Food Rescue US (app-based service, <https://foodrescue.us/>). You can find more food rescue organizations near you at <https://foodrescuelocator.com/>.

52. Using your local food co-op, **create a community buying club** that will help leverage the purchasing power of your community members, increase access to nutritious food, and build community bonds. What's a community buying club, and how does it work? Basically, you throw in with some family and friends to buy food (or other products) in larger sizes or in bulk, because bulk products have lower prices per unit. This saves money for everyone involved! Learn more about food buying clubs here: <https://www.smallfootprintfamily.com/how-to-start-a-food-buying-club>.

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