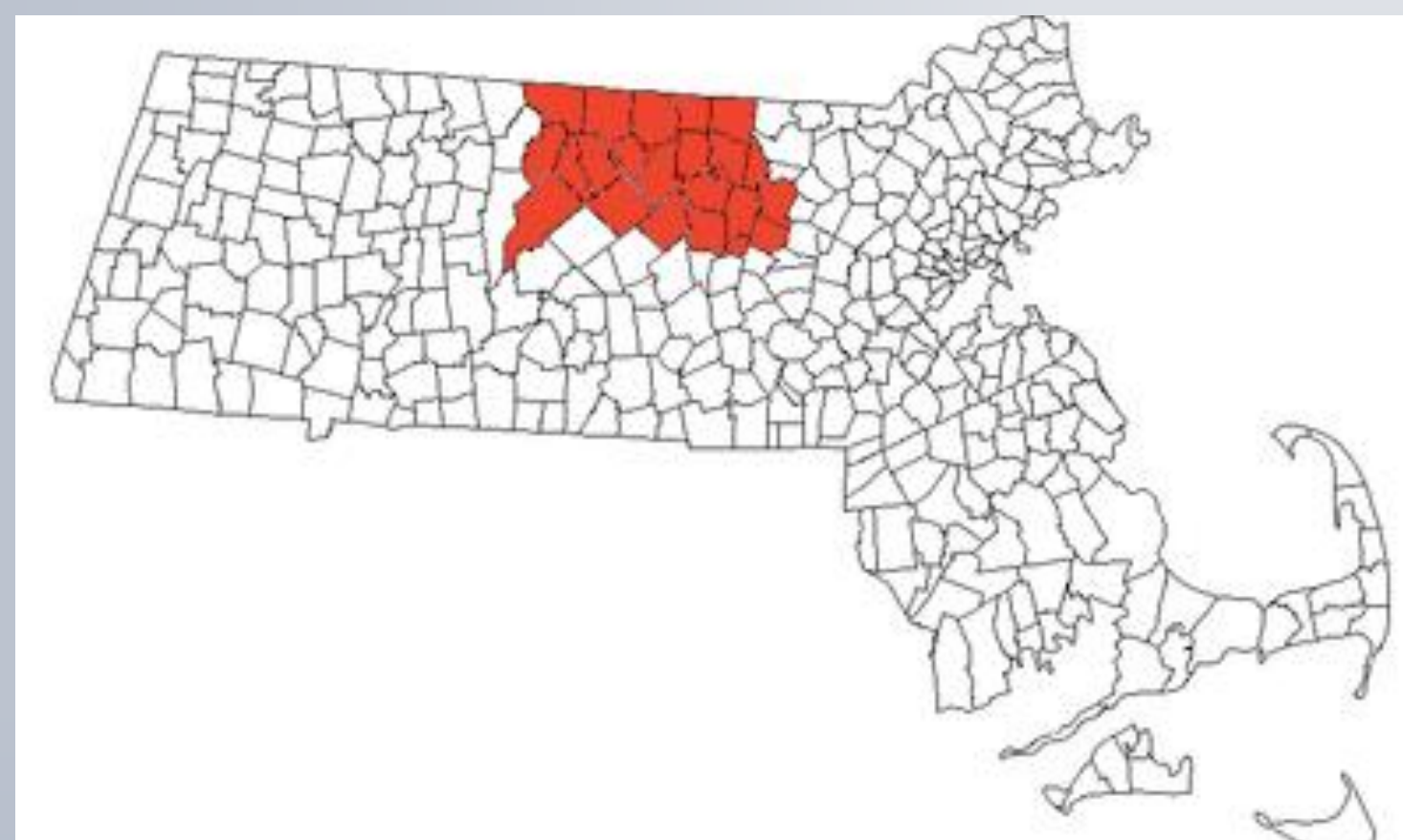


BACKGROUND

- The **Community Health Network for North Central, Massachusetts** (CNHA9) includes the communities of Ashburnham, Ashby, Ayer, Barre, Berlin, Bolton, Clinton, Fitchburg, Gardner, Groton, Hardwick, Harvard, Hubbardston, Lancaster, Leominster, Lunenburg, New Braintree, Oakham, Pepperell, Princeton, Rutland, Shirley, Sterling, Templeton, Townsend, Westminster, and Winchendon.
- CHNA9 was created in 1992 by the Department of Public Health to improve public health through collaboration of local towns and cities.
- A **Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)** was developed using the needs of the community as determined by two prior Community Health Assessments completed in 2012 and 2015.
- Community Health Assessments determined four priority areas of need in the communities including:
 - Healthy Eating and Active Living – based on high rates of diabetes, heart disease, and obesity
 - Healthy and Safe Relationships – based on high rates of domestic violence and child abuse and neglect
 - Mental and Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse – based on high rates of smoking, alcohol, and opioid abuse, and shortages of available beds and services for mental and behavioral health
 - Transportation and Access – based on data showing transportation as a major barrier to accessing health care, jobs, social services, and healthy foods
- A **Healthy Eating working group** was established in order to improve access and availability of healthy foods in North Central Massachusetts.



PURPOSE

The Healthy Eating Working Group will create a regional **Community Food Assessment (CFA)** for North Central Massachusetts to better support residents in the community to make healthy eating choices.

The CFA will help determine barriers to accessing affordable fruits and vegetables in North Central Massachusetts. Plans of implementation will be set to reduce these barriers by 2020.

The main goal of the CFA will be to **increase access to healthy foods** in North Central in food insecure households and communities.

The food assessments will compile regional data on areas and issues including:

- Dietary needs of the community
- Food production, food distribution outlets, and patterns of food distribution
- Community resident perceptions of food environments and food shopping
- Community resident perceptions of food preparation
- Food consumption behaviors

Information gained from the food assessment will be used to direct efforts of policymakers and community organizations to better serve the needs of the residents of North Central through access to healthy food.

The food assessment will become a tool to raise awareness in the community of food system deficits, give evidence to the community of important needs, and give information to residents in order to advocate for policy change and new program implementation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Primary Data Collection

Tier 1 and tier 2 towns and cities were identified by employment and unemployment rates and mean household salaries to determine areas of most need. Initial supermarket surveys were completed for markets located in Tier 1 towns and cities. A food assessment survey was created and reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, including consent forms. The survey will also be available in Spanish and incorporated into an electronic survey version for convenient distribution.

Secondary Data Collection and Analysis

Electronic data collection will begin. Partners for outreach have been determined and contacted for assistance in distributing the survey within the community. Community programs and organizations such as community centers, senior centers, school, town halls, churches, and local papers were contacted in order to distribute surveys to members of the community without access to electronic copies of the survey.

TIMELINE

Food Assessment Survey Deployment

The CFA Survey will deploy in late summer 2017. Initial data analysis will take place in early fall 2017, and data collection will likely be completed by mid fall 2017.

Questions requiring further data collection will be identified and discussed through **community focus groups**.

Final data will be analyzed in early winter following the focus groups and a draft of the report will be completed.

By early 2018, the regional food assessment for North Central Massachusetts will be made available to community members, organizations, and policy makers to **implement plans for change by 2020**.

CONCLUSIONS

- The Community Healthy Improvement Plan identified 4 major areas of need in North Central Massachusetts, including the need for **access to healthy foods**.
- The Healthy Eating Working Group determined that creating a Community Food Assessment would serve as a tool to implement change to decrease barriers to accessing healthy foods, especially in food insecure households and communities.
- The Community Food Assessment will be completed and available in early 2018 with the goal of reducing barriers to accessing affordable fruits and vegetables within the community by 2020.

REFERENCES

1. North Central Massachusetts Community Health Improvement Plan 2020
2. Community Health Network of North Central Massachusetts

Acknowledgements:

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