



Blue Ridge Area
FOOD BANK

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Contact: Abena Foreman-Trice
Media & Community Relations Manager
Blue Ridge Area Food Bank
540.213.8405
aforemantrice@brafb.org

Providing Food to COVID-19 Patients in Quarantine

Blue Ridge Area Food Bank teams up with valley healthcare groups to ensure sick individuals aren't without meals

(VERONA, Va.—May 27, 2020)—As if battling a scary and mysterious virus isn't enough, some individuals with or suspected of having COVID-19 also face hunger. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank and three valley healthcare groups teamed up to keep these individuals nourished while in quarantine.

When they are discharged from care or while they await test results, financially vulnerable patients at Augusta Health's hospital emergency room, and Waynesboro Assessment Center, and Sentara RMH Medical Center receive shelf-stable food supplies packed in boxes by Food Bank volunteers. The food is provided free of charge so that patients and their household members self-isolating due to COVID-19 have the meals they need.

“Partnering with local healthcare organizations provides a perfect opportunity to meet the nutritional needs of COVID-affected patients before they go home to self-isolate,” says Maria Bowman, programs manager at the Food Bank. “We hope this food makes their isolation and recovery feel a bit less daunting.”



Loading food at the Food Bank, Verona

Augusta Health began distributing food boxes to their COVID-19 positive or suspected case patients in April, based on a screening that determines whether an individual needs food. Called *Mask and a Meal*, Augusta Health's distribution program provides an array of helpful resources to patients in addition to food. Augusta Health's hospital emergency room, and Waynesboro Assessment Center provide food boxes to any patient who has been tested for COVID-19 and needs food while they await their results at home.



(L to R) Caroline Hackley and Kara Meeks, dietitians at Augusta Health, and Brittani Parr, with Augusta Medical Group

“Our food distribution partnership is important on many levels,” says Mary Arrowood, director of operations for Augusta Care Partners. “Our new COVID Care Management Team connects with every patient who is tested for COVID at an Augusta Health facility to provide support, education, and information.

“This connection begins right after testing, while results are pending, and continues for those patients who are COVID positive. When assessing the patient’s needs, one of the questions we ask is about their access to food,” Arrowood adds. “We noticed an emerging trend of food insecurity due to isolation during these calls, and we are excited to be able to meet those needs in partnership with the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank.”

Due north off the 1-81 corridor, Sentara RMH also distributes food boxes of shelf-stable items to patients in need and impacted by COVID-19. Their distribution process includes:

- Providing food supplies to confirmed COVID-19 patients leaving the hospital to self-quarantine.
- Providing food supplies to newly tested patients leaving the emergency room to await results.
- Following up through phone calls to patients at home under self-quarantine in need of additional food.



Lourdes Rhodes, Interpreter, Sentara RMH

“With more than 50 spoken languages in our service area, Sentara RMH is working to meet the needs of our culturally diverse population,” says Patra Reed, regional director at Sentara RMH. “The Food Bank was able to provide printed instructions in the most common second language—Spanish—to help patients who need additional food from local pantries. Our interpreters are also assisting in determining need.



(L to R) Cindy Harlow, Brenda Parker, Patra Reed, and Dennis Showalter of Sentara RMH

“This initial box of food provides staple food items along with educational information on self-quarantine and isolation. Many in our community already have feelings of isolation, are without employment at this time, and may feel anxious about using more formal types of aid. This program is a great support to many facing food insecurity in our community,” Reed adds.

Another option for patients seeking food—including fresh produce and protein—is to utilize their nearest Food Bank partner food pantry.

Patients are encouraged to designate a healthy person to pick up food supplies on their behalf. A quick search of the Food Bank’s pantry locator tool (www.brafb.org/find-help)

reveals the location and phone number for nearby pantries. Patients or their designees should call ahead before visiting to confirm distribution hours.

Upon arrival at a pantry, food pick-up designees must provide the recipient's name, address, phone number, and the number of adults and children in the recipient's household.

Designees must be able to deliver the food supplies without direct contact with the patient or anyone in the patient's household.

"We want to ensure these individuals can focus on getting better instead of where their next meal will come from," Bowman adds.

Funds from [a grant awarded by Sentara Healthcare and Optima Health to the Federation of Virginia Food Banks](#) helped make this initiative possible. The goal of the grant is to support needs stemming from Medicaid expansion, and address social determinants affecting the health and well-being of low-income Virginians.

For more information, please contact Abena Foreman-Trice at 540-280-6588.

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About the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank:

Founded in 1981, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is the largest organization alleviating hunger in western and central Virginia. Headquartered in Verona, VA, the Food Bank serves 25 counties and eight cities through distribution centers in Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Winchester, and Verona. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank distributes nearly 26.4 million pounds of food annually to 103,500 people each month through a network of 205 community partners – food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, schools, churches and other non-profit groups – and 175 program sites serving children, seniors, and families. The Food Bank is a member of Feeding America, a national food bank association that supports 200 food banks across the United States. For more information, visit www.brafb.org.