The Yukon Kuskokwim Delta

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation administers a comprehensive health care delivery system for 58 rural communities in southwest Alaska. The YKHC service area is approximately the size of Oregon state and is not on a road system, making the coordination of services and access to resources challenging. Plane, boat, four wheeler, snow machine and ice roads are common modes of transportation to receive care and stock up on supplies.

Challenges

Due in large part to transportation challenges, the logistics of getting produce to communities in the region in a timely and affordable fashion prevent many stores from offering these items to their customers.

Items that are easier to bring in and sell are non-perishable, less healthy options such as chips, pop, and frozen meals. This makes it harder for families to choose healthy options and poses a challenge for Diabetes Prevention & Control (DP&C) staff when discussing healthy eating as a component of diabetes management.

Solution

DP&C partnered with a local farm in Bethel, Meyers Farm, to create fresh produce boxes. The boxes were then sent through local airlines to patients in the YKHC service area. The boxes were sent at no cost to the patient and were delivered on a weekly basis.

This process allowed for DP&C to promote healthy eating as a method of both diabetes prevention and management as it made the acquisition of fresh produce a viable possibility. Applications for produce boxes were accepted on a weekly basis. Patients were able to request one box each week, but were required to submit a new application each week that they wished to receive a produce box.

Results

This pilot produce program lasted approximately six months. In that time, a total of 2,002 produce boxes were provided to 1,027 non-duplicative participants. 407 participants received more than one box throughout the duration of the program. Boxes were delivered to patients in 39 of the 58 communities served by YKHC.

Feedback

Feedback from produce box recipients was overwhelmingly positive.

“This is the most veggies we have had. Most of the time our village store doesn’t have what you send. Since this started, the veggies and fruit are there for my family. We grab the veggies and fruit instead of candy and other sweet stuff. I am enjoying the fruit and veggie box that I am getting each week. I look forward to the box. Thank you so much.” — Participant Response

“Being in this program has been a blessing. It was like receiving a ‘care package’ whenever a box arrived. Thank you for including us. I hope this program never ends.” — Participant Response

Awards

Meyers Farm was the recipient of the 2019 Food Hero Award through the Alaska Food Policy Council (AFPC), in large part due to their partnership with DP&C in this produce program.

AFPC noted the impact Meyers Farm has had on the local and statewide food system in Alaska as they worked towards finding creative ways to increase access to fresh foods in the remote villages in this region. DP&C is equally grateful for the wonderful partnership that has formed with Meyers Farm and their willingness to help overcome the barriers found in this region.