

Community Gardens



Dignity Health Foundation recognizes that a healthy diet is essential to healthy living. Residents of the communities surrounding our hospitals sometimes lack access to nutritious foods, or cannot afford them. Hospital-based community gardens are one answer to this wellness challenge.

The Need

Among residents of low-income areas, high rates of childhood obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease often go hand in hand with severely limited food budgets, poor eating habits, and limited availability of fresh nutritious foods. The burden on individuals, communities, and the larger society is immense and growing. Dignity Health, like so many health systems across the country, must commit ever-increasing resources to treating these conditions. **To reverse these trends, one community at a time, food can be a potent medicine.**

The Opportunity

As the largest health care system in California, Dignity Health is well positioned to promote healthier habits within the communities we serve, working closely with residents. **We're investing in the promise of hospital-based community gardens to teach, nourish, heal, and connect.** These gardens help to educate volunteer gardeners about healthier food choices, while also providing access to foods that sustain body and soul.

Each garden will also serve as a therapeutic space for individuals and their care givers struggling with serious or life-threatening illnesses. Research indicates that time in nature can reduce patients' anxiety.

Dignity Health maintains two wonderful examples of community gardens: the **Joanne Wheeler Memorial Garden at Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz, California**, and the **Jerry Roek Garden at St. Joseph's Medical Center in Stockton, California**. Both gardens feature contemplative spaces that offer respite to patients and their families.

The gardens have also increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables for community members and helped them to improve their eating habits. Dominican Hospital is even adding a small orchard to produce even more options for healthy eating.

Next Steps and the Impact of Your Support

The Dignity Health Foundation aims to expand its successful Community Gardens Project with the **launch of new gardens at two California hospitals – one at Mercy Medical Center in Merced, one at St. John’s Regional Medical Center in Oxnard**. These new green spaces will be designed to respond to local needs and reflect the assets of community partners. Each hospital has agreed to dedicate the land required for the garden and has committed to sustaining it beyond the two-year, initial investment period.



“I believe there is nothing more important than the work we are doing to redefine human health to include a healthy environment and a healthy planet.”

- Lloyd H. Dean, president & chief executive officer of Dignity Health

Dignity Health Foundation is seeking additional funds to launch the project. More specifically, your support will enable us to:

- **work with a master gardener to plan the new gardens,**
- **construct garden beds and provide tools for cultivation,**
- **offer educational programming, and**
- **upgrade the two gardens at Dominican Hospital and St. Joseph’s Medical Center.**

In Conclusion

With your help, we will put the tools of health promotion in the hands of our patients, empowering them to help themselves. They will gain knowledge about healthy eating and enjoy the fruits of their labors.

The true yield will be healthier families, and a generation of children freed from debilitating chronic conditions. By building greener, more sustainable spaces within our system of care, we can promote practices that improve both health and human dignity.

Join Dignity Health Foundation in this important effort by supporting the Community Gardens – visit dignityhealthfoundation.org to get involved, donate, and learn more.