

## NEWS / HEALTH

## Two pediatricians win grant to detect food insecurity in patients



Pediatricians Sara Siddiqui of the NYU Langone Huntington Medical Group, left, and Eve Meltzer Krief of Huntington Village Pediatrics. Credit: Dr. Eve Meltzer Krief

By **Lisa L. Colangelo**

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Two Long Island pediatricians have won a national grant to help detect food insecurity among young patients and connect their families with local food pantries and other resources to help them get the nutrition they need.

Dr. Sara Siddiqui of the NYU Langone Huntington Medical Group and Dr. Eve Meltzer Krief of Huntington Village Pediatrics said they applied for the grant because food insecurity is a growing problem on Long Island.

“We tend to think everybody is kind of well off,” said Siddiqui. “But there are situations where people are losing their jobs or lack of shelter and these things lead to kids not having the right resources or food.”

The grant from the No Kid Hungry campaign of the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group Share Our Strength will fund a pilot project at Allied Physicians Group pediatric offices in the Riverhead and Peconic area with Long Island Cares as a partner.

## WHAT TO KNOW

- **Two Long Island pediatricians have won** a national grant to help detect food insecurity in their patients and connect them with food pantries and other services.
- **The grant from the Share Our Strength’s No Kid Hungry campaign** will fund a pilot project at Allied Physicians pediatric offices in the Riverhead and Peconic area with Long Island Cares as a partner.
- **One in four adults on Long Island and about 68,000 children** face food insecurity, according to LI Cares.

Long Island Cares, which operates food pantries and other nutrition programs in Nassau and Suffolk counties, will assist families in providing food either on-site at the offices or through nearby facilities.

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According to the nonprofit, one in four adults on Long Island and about 68,000 children face food insecurity.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as the “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”

Meltzer-Krief, who works at Huntington Village Pediatrics, said all families will be asked through a questionnaire whether they have been concerned about or experienced running out of food before they could afford to purchase more.

“There will be a designated person in each office to follow up with the family,” said Meltzer Krief. “We want this to be on the radar of all pediatricians so all families are screened for food insecurity on a regular basis and then connected with resources.”

The \$20,000 grant was one of 14 awarded to state chapters of the American Academy of Pediatrics across the United States. Siddiqui and Meltzer Krief applied as part of the American Academy of Pediatrics New York Chapter 2.

"Sometimes pediatricians' offices don't know what's available locally," said Siddiqui. "There might be a food pantry right down the road from us that we can partner with. This grant allows us to build partnerships."

Dr. Suanne Kowal-Connelly, director of Pediatric Clinical Quality at Harmony Healthcare LI, which focuses on underserved communities in Nassau County, said teaching and advising families is a major part of the work pediatricians do.

“To achieve good health, children need to be able to eat well, sleep well, drink properly and get enough physical activity,” she said. “Children thrive when these elements are satisfied properly and everything really starts with good sustenance which is eating healthy.”

Kowal-Connelly said children who are not eating properly can face health issues and struggle in school.

“We know that without proper nutrition, children aren’t able to be at their best academically,” she said.

Rachel Sabella, director of No Kid Hungry New York, pointed out that the average child visits their pediatricians on average about 20 times during their first five years.

"I grew up on Long Island. I know how hunger hides in plain sight there," she said. "Hunger isn't a thing that's easy to see or for people to talk about. When people want to address this in their lives, they talk about it with someone that they trust and pediatricians have that trust."

Sabella noted that families are facing skyrocketing cost of living expenses ranging from utilities to groceries.

And they may not know about different programs available to them, such as SNAP, WIC or the free summer meals programs that provides breakfast and lunch at different locations including parks and playgrounds, she said. Some families may not realize they are eligible for free or reduced school lunch and never fill out the paperwork.

“Families that hadn’t faced this issue before are dealing with it now,” she said. “There really is a struggle and a lot of people don’t want to admit this. We want them to know there is help. ... Continuing to make them aware of these services and especially what is in their community is going to be a game changer.”



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Lisa joined Newsday as a staff writer in 2019. She previously worked at amNewYork, the New York Daily News and the Asbury Park Press covering politics, government and general assignment.

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