



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Nourish food pantry opens at Watsonville Community Hospital

Trailblazing idea to address health outcomes becomes reality

WATSONVILLE, CA, February 8, 2024 – When a person doesn't have access to enough safe, healthy food, it can lead to all kinds of health issues including diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and more. Good nutrition starting at an early age, on the other hand, can mean better long-term health. That's why Watsonville Community Hospital and Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County have partnered to open Nourish, one of the first food pantries located inside a hospital in California.

Having a food pantry within the walls of a hospital is a trailblazing idea that demonstrates the type of innovation happening at Watsonville Community Hospital. There are only a small handful of similar initiatives between food banks and health clinics in California seeking to address nutrition as an underlying factor of good health.

According to Erica Padilla-Chavez, executive director of Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County, "across the country, food banks recognize nutrition as a social determinant of health, but we're proud to lead the way with this cutting-edge program right here in Watsonville that brings healthy food directly to people receiving healthcare."

The idea for Nourish began in the summer of 2023 when Padilla-Chavez, her sister June Ponce, executive director of Watsonville Community Hospital Foundation, and then-interim CEO of Watsonville Community Hospital Matko Vranjes had a conversation about the importance of giving back to the community they've called home their whole lives.

"Matko, my sister Erica, and I all grew up in Watsonville," explains Ponce. "We remember standing in line at the Food Bank as kids. Nourish was borne out of a desire to give back. Now that Watsonville Community Hospital is non-profit and owned by the community again, we are able to partner with other community-based organizations, and when we do that, it's easy to collaborate because we have a shared vision of making things happen for our neighbors in need."

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Nourish specifically targets pre- and post-natal women and their families. Expectant mothers can pick up a variety of fresh, local produce and healthy shelf-stable foods like rice, beans, and an assortment of canned goods, throughout their pregnancy and after the delivery.

According to a [study](#) published in the *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology*, “comprehensive improvements in nutrition and health status of women before and during pregnancy will contribute to optimal fetal growth, favorable obstetrical outcomes, improved perinatal survival, and the potential for better long-term health in both the mother and offspring.”

Stephen Gray, CEO of Watsonville Community Hospital and the Pajaro Valley Healthcare District says Nourish is part of the overall vision of the organization. “We fully anticipate this will be just the first of many ways we can address health equity in the Pajaro Valley and make an impact on the health outcomes both within and outside the walls of our hospital.”

In addition to providing free food, Nourish staff can help people with other services, including signing up for Cal Fresh, getting recertified for Medi-Cal and getting information about CalWorks. And if visiting Nourish is difficult with their busy schedule, expectant moms can sign up to have food delivered to their home, thanks to a partnership between Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County and Amazon.

Although Nourish is initially being promoted to expectant mothers, any patient or visitor to Watsonville Community Hospital can get fresh food at the pantry; nobody will be turned away.

Nourish is currently funded for one year. The goal now is to secure ongoing philanthropic funding, so it can continue to support moms and babies now and into the future.

Nourish is located just to the right of the main lobby of Watsonville Community Hospital, 75 Nielson St, Watsonville. Starting Monday, February 19, hours of operation will be Monday – Thursday, 1 – 6pm, and Friday 9am – 12pm.

About Watsonville Community Hospital

Watsonville Community Hospital is a public, non-profit community healthcare provider; a 106-bed acute care facility serving Watsonville and the surrounding culturally diverse tri-county area along California’s Central Coast. The hospital offers a wide range of quality medical and surgical services including cardiac care, diagnostic imaging, emergency services, maternity services, orthopedics, pediatrics, rehabilitation services, robotic surgery, urology, vascular surgery, women’s health services, and wound care. With 650 employees and more than 300 physicians, the hospital strives to exceed patient expectations, deliver the highest quality care, and be a place of healing, caring and connection for patients and families in the community we call home. Watsonvillehospital.com

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About the Pajaro Valley Health Care District

The Pajaro Valley Health Care District is a political subdivision of the state of California. It was created by the Pajaro Valley Healthcare District Project, a collaboration between the County of Santa Cruz, the City of Watsonville, Salud Para La Gente, and the Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley, which came together in 2021 to save Watsonville Community Hospital from bankruptcy and establish public oversight of the hospital. The healthcare district boundaries run from Aptos in the north to Las Lomas in the south. The Pajaro Valley Health Care District Hospital Corporation, dba Watsonville Community Hospital, performs the essential government function of operating Watsonville Community Hospital and other related ancillary services and outpatient clinics; and promotes the health and welfare of the general public, particularly those individuals residing in the Pajaro Valley community.

About Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County

Founded in 1972, Second Harvest Food Bank was the first food bank in California and the second in the nation. Its mission is to inspire and support Santa Cruz County to provide nourishment for all community members. Its network of nearly 130 local agencies and programs feeds 65,000 people in Santa Cruz County every month. In our community's efforts to ease food-insecurity, we recognize our donors, we celebrate our volunteers, we're thankful for our partners and staff, and we truly see all our neighbors. We are the Food Bank.
TheFoodBank.org

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