Key Takeaways
The primary discussion among the breakout groups was how the state of Rhode Island can support programs that promote food access from a healthcare lens.

Five key themes that emerged from breakout room discussions are as follows:

● **More financial support and technical assistance for the evaluation of promising food access programs is needed.** Programs that provide access to fresh, healthy food as part of healthcare are anecdotally beneficial for participants but there is a need for more evaluation of their long term impacts. This data would help the host organizations secure longer term funding, strategize how to scale/expand, and also share these lessons with other partners throughout the state who may want to operate similar programs. **Funding for pilot programs should include additional funds specifically for technical assistance to help organizations more effectively evaluate these programs and their impacts.**

● **The stigma associated with accessing supplemental food is preventing people from benefiting from them.** Food access sites such as food pantries should be easy to find, host accessible hours, create a pleasant shopping experience and train staff in customer service and cultural sensitivity skills. The reality is that many food pantries rely on volunteer staff and have limited budgets, making it difficult to invest in training and facility upgrades. **The RI Community Food Bank requires certain standards and offers training for the more than 160 partner agencies in their network, which is helpful for improving the quality of customer service at these food distribution sites.**

● **Assistance with transportation remains a critical need in all types of food access programs.** Many of the organizations who facilitated the pilot programs discussed today (veggie prescription programs, Produce to People bags) described the challenge of providing access to these programs for their clients/patients who did not have reliable transportation. **The state should invest in and expand programs that assist with supplemental food delivery options, including free online SNAP grocery delivery, and organizations such as Cartwheel RI, Be Kind RI, Meals on Wheels, etc.**
• Providing information on nutrition, gardening, and how to cook healthy and culturally appropriate meals with these pilot programs helps patients further leverage their benefits. Online cooking classes, including small cooking tools and spices with the produce, and sharing recipes help patients better understand and utilize the fresh produce for healthier living.

• The medical community plays a key role in food access. The Task Force Members agreed that having clinicians perform nutrition screenings is helpful, but a third party or trained individual (such as a community health worker or Lifespan’s Connect for Health Advocate) is needed to comprehensively educate and connect individuals to social support services for improved long term health outcomes. The state should continue to support community health workers and advocates who can provide this critical connection.