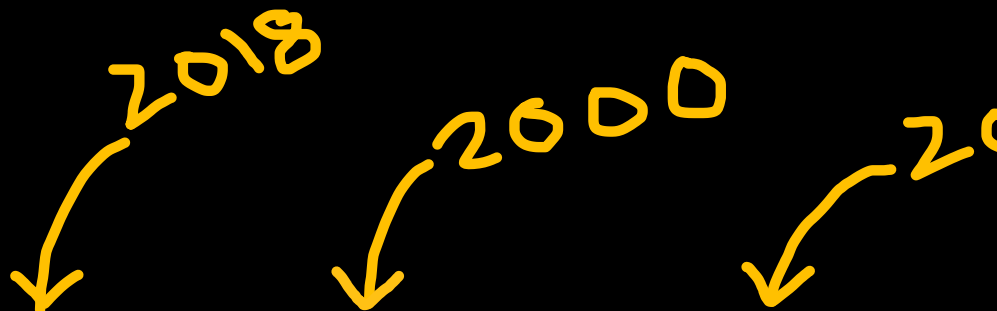


“We are trained to survive.”

Using Human-Centered Design to Learn Veterans' Experiences Seeking
Food Assistance

Nipa Kamdar, PhD, RN, FNP-BC



VA Health Systems Researcher

Center for Innovations in Quality, Effectiveness, & Safety

Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center

Houston, TX



Study Team

Nipa Kamdar, PhD, RN, FNP-BC

Principal Investigator

Trenton Haltom, PhD

Qualitative Methodologist

Chasity Wohlford, US Navy Veteran

Research Assistant

John Smith, US Marine Veteran

Study Consultant



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- Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States government.



Request for grace

It has been a rough month.

Poll: What is your relation to Veterans?

- A. I am a Veteran.
- B. I am a frontline healthcare provider to Veterans.
- C. I am researcher focused on Veterans.
- D. I am with a community organization that serves Veterans.
- E. I am with a program office that serves Veterans.
- F. I am an advocate for Veterans but not in any of the capacities listed above.

Food Insecurity

US Department of
Agriculture definition:
a household-level
economic and social
condition of limited
or uncertain access to
adequate food.



Food insecurity is a known threat to Veteran health and well-being

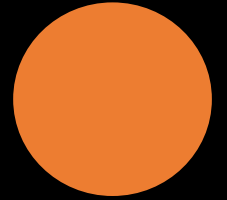
- More likely than civilian counter-part to reduce intake or skip meals
- Associated with depression and suicide ideation



Current Solutions

Federal programs like SNAP

Charitable food distributions



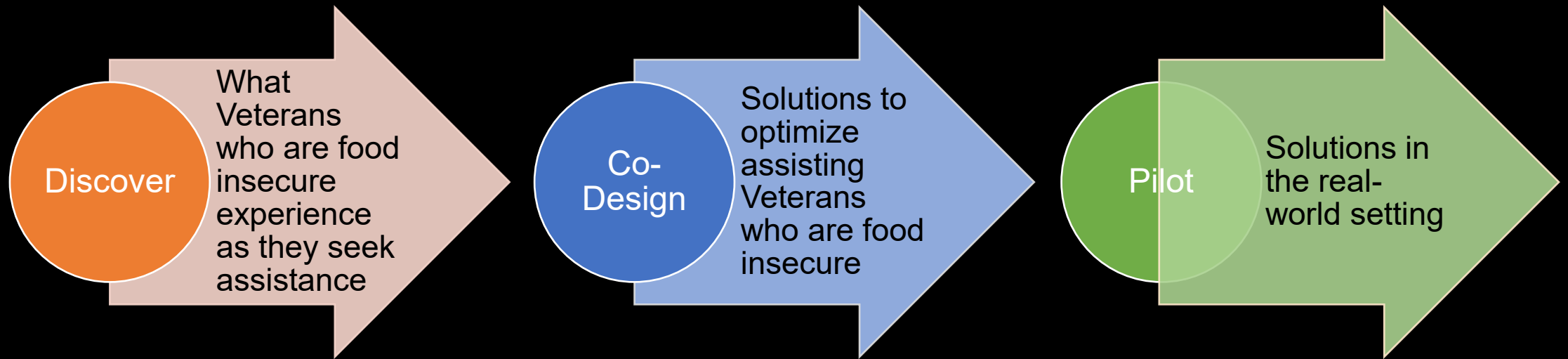
Prior research suggests that Veterans having difficulty using these solutions.

But it was unclear why.

We need to see the problem from the Veteran perspective.



Enter Human-Centered Design



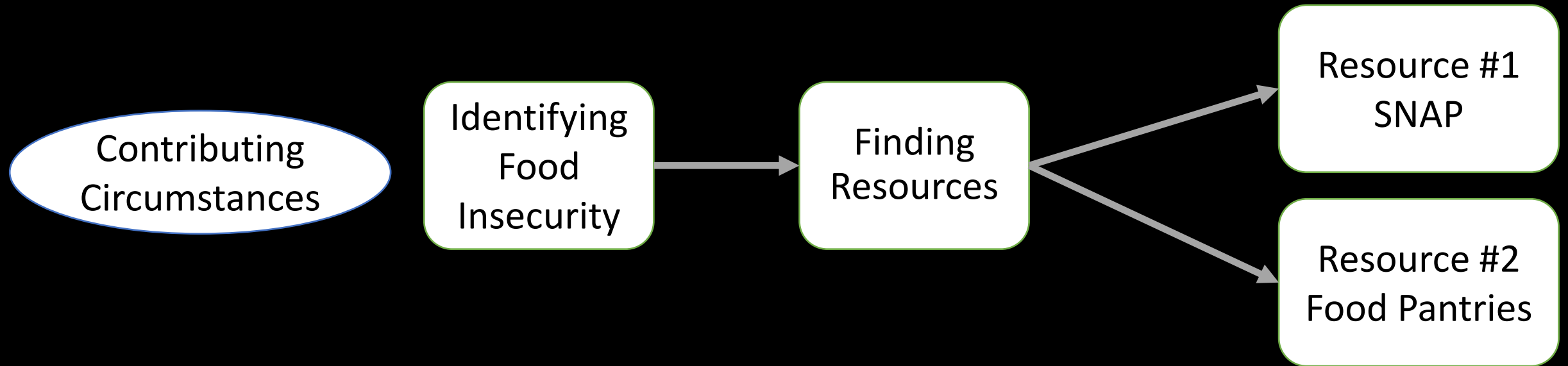
Focus on Discovery



Discover

What
Veterans
who are food
insecure
experience
as they seek
assistance

Discovery Method: Journey Map



Discovery Method: Setting & Recruitment

Houston, Texas

- VHA clinic lobbies
- Community organizations

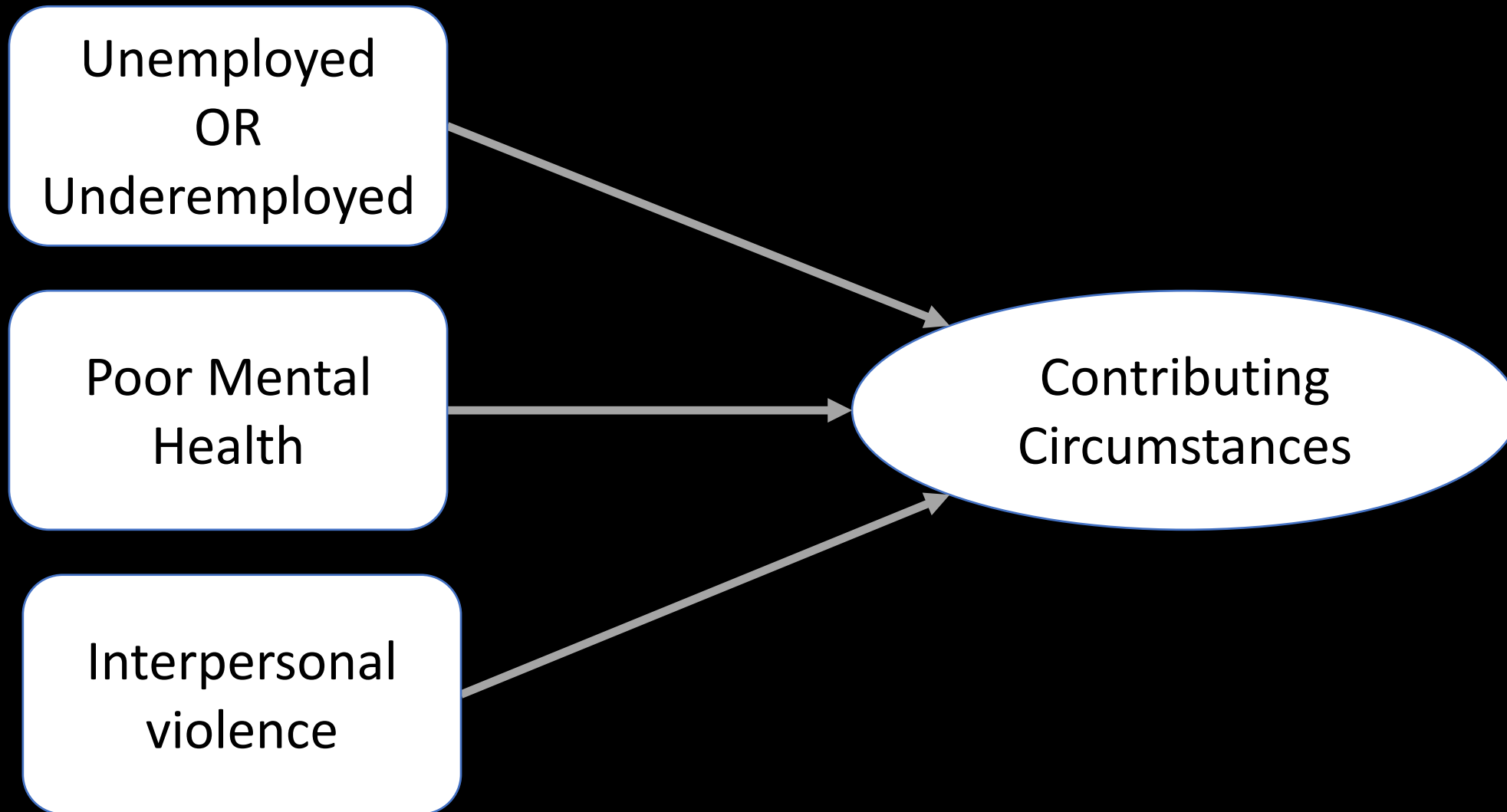
Inclusion Criteria

- age 18-65 years
- positive Hunger Vital Sign

Study Sample (N=30) Characteristics

- Average age: 51 years
- Gender:
 - Cisgender man 53% (n=16)
 - Cisgender woman 43% (n=13)
 - Trans Woman 3% (n=1)
- Relationship status:
 - Single 64% (n=18)
 - Partnered 36% (n=10)
- Households w/ children: 36% (n=10)
- **Rurality:**
 - Rural 33% (n=10)
 - Urban 60% (n=18)
 - Unknown 7% (n=2)
- Employed: 21% (n=6)
- **Food Security:**
 - **Very low 78% (n=21)**
 - Low 19% (n=5)
 - High 4% (n=1)

*Missing partial survey data on 2 Veterans & all survey data on 1 Veteran



“We’re trained to survive.”

Identifying
Food
Insecurity

“On the outside, we
wouldn’t look like people
who struggle.”

“I didn’t really feel like a human being. I felt more like an ant. I know some people look at ants as this, you know, you can carry a weight, a bigger weight, but I didn’t feel like an ant in that regard. I just felt small.”

Finding Resources

“And when you feel small like that, it’s hard to— even if you felt like you could trust someone, it’s hard to even ask certain things.”

To apply, you need:

- internet access
- computer OR smart phone
- stable address and contact information

SNAP

- All Veterans knew of SNAP
- Nearly all had applied
- Most did not qualify
- Of those who did, some got the minimum (\$20 a month)

"It's like I've been burned so many times that like I don't even bother to try anymore."

“It’s good, but...”

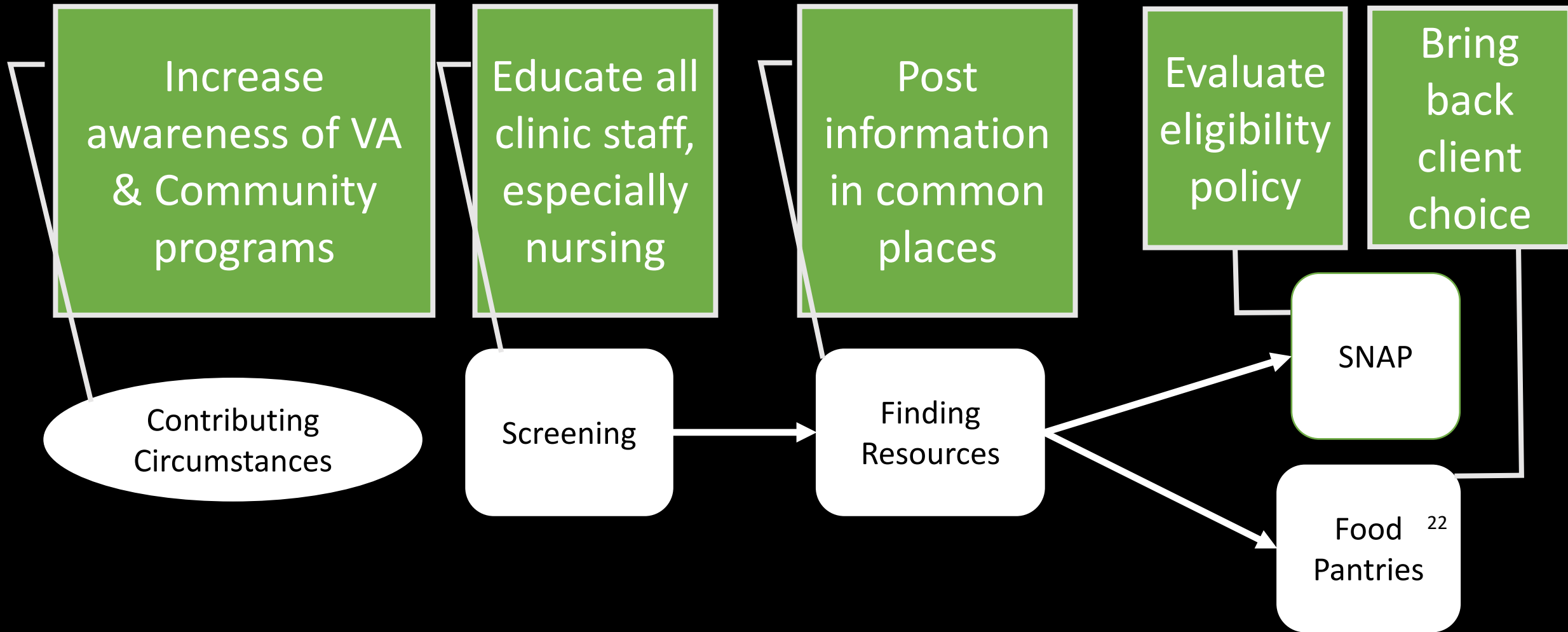
Food
Pantries

“What they’re able to offer is not enough. ‘Cuz we don’t get meat or bread or, sometimes we get potatoes... like 30 pounds...I’m stopped going, unless I really, really need to”

Did Veterans find the assistance they needed?

“I’m still in limbo.”

Opportunities to improve care



Limitations

- All study participants were enrolled and using VHA services.
- Focused on one geographical region of the U.S.
- Focused on SNAP and food distributions solutions only

Next Steps

- Currently applying these findings forward in my VA HSR&D Career Development Award
- Used human-centered design to create a solution that is undergoing pilot testing now.

For more details:

- Kamdar, N., Haltom, T., Epshteyn, G., Wohlford, C., Smith, J., Celardo, C., & True, G. (2024). " We're Trained to Survive.": Veterans' Experiences Seeking Food Assistance. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 35(1), 264-284.
- Haltom, T.; Kamdar, N. (In Press). Exploring Journey Maps as Products from Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Health Research*.

Let's Connect!

Nipa.Kamdar@va.gov





Questions / Comments