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**UAMS, AmeriCorps VISTA Members Provide Access
to Fresh Foods to Nearly a Quarter of a Million Arkansans**

LITTLE ROCK — Since September 2023, AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) members embedded at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Institute for Community Health Innovation have provided access to fresh foods for almost a quarter of a million Arkansans.

VISTA is a program that provides full-time volunteers to nonprofit organizations, educational institutions and local governmental agencies that serve low-income communities. The Institute for Community Health Innovation supports a statewide AmeriCorps VISTA program called Arkansas Community Health Corps, which centers on providing strategies for food security, nutrition education, agriculture and community-based work across the state.

VISTA service members play a vital role in their communities by providing nutrition education, food distribution, volunteer recruitment and more, said Cale Nicholson, a senior project manager who leads the VISTA work at the institute. While members do not directly engage in service work, their focus is on expanding the effectiveness of programs and providing volunteers for organizations.

“I’m grateful for our volunteers and service members who helped further the institute’s mission to create a better state for all,” Nicholson said. “From streamlining food pantry check-in processes to piloting nutrition education curricula and working with landowners to establish a gardening program, our VISTA members’ community service projects increased access to healthy foods for community members across the state.”

In addition to providing access to fresh foods for more than 230,000 Arkansans, AmeriCorps VISTA service members dedicated more than 4,000 hours to community outreach and recruited more than 1,100 volunteers who were placed at nonprofit organizations across the state. These organizations include the Arkansas Hunger Relief

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Alliance, Open Arms Food Pantry, Oasis of Northwest Arkansas, St. Joseph Center, Elaine Legacy Center and St. James Food Pantry.

“The impact that AmeriCorps VISTA members have on families and communities in Arkansas is significant because we focus on community outreach to create sustainable strategies to reach those communities that are largely underserved,” said Brooke Harbin, a VISTA member and project coordinator at the institute. “Because VISTA members are hand-picked by their organization, they are often trusted community members, which allows them to serve their community on a personal level to promote sustainability and success.”

The Institute for Community Health Innovation works with schools and community organizations to increase access to nutritious foods for Arkansas families. Learn more about the institute’s Health, Hunger and Nutrition programs at communityhealth.uams.edu.

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and eight institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute, Institute for Digital Health & Innovation and the Institute for Community Health Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS’ clinical enterprise. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,485 students, 915 medical residents and fellows, and seven dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 11,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children’s, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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