

Brief: Food and Nutrition



General Description

Good nutrition and quality food access is important to long-term health and success in life across all income categories but can be hard to find in low-income communities. Geographic, social and cultural diversity in communities means that food resource needs, expectations and incentives vary greatly at the local level.¹

One major federal food assistance program is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP - called Basic Food in Washington), which provides “food stamps” to low-income households. The federal program’s average food budget for eligible households (the Thrifty Food Plan) does help many, but has limitations. The plan assumes limited food choices, lacks the variety of the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, assumes adequate available transportation, underestimates food waste and portions, assumes adequate facilities and time for food preparation, and does not allow for special dietary or cultural needs.²

Beyond just government programs, nonprofit organizations and faith-based groups also play a critical role in meeting the nutritional needs of the community. Food banks solicit, collect, store, and dispense large donations of food to food pantries, which distribute the items directly to families and individuals in need. Emergency kitchens (also called soup kitchens) provide prepared food to those who attend mealtimes.³

Example programs that might fall under this focus area:

- Food Banks
- Food Pantries
- Nutrition Programs
- Summer Feeding Programs

Snohomish County Stats:

- Population: 746,653
 - Under 18: 174,695
 - 18 to 64: 484,948
 - Over 64: 87,010
- Poverty Rate: 10.2%
 - Under 18: 13.6%
 - 18 to 64: 9.4%
 - Over 64: 7.5%

Source: U.S. Census 2015, 5-yr avg.

Relationship to Poverty

Access: Many low-income families live in neighborhoods (called “food deserts”) that lack convenient and affordable healthy foods accessible through grocery stores or supermarkets, but have an abundance of fast food and convenience stores stocking only a limited variety of low-quality foods. When available, nutritious food choices are costly. Those with better access to supermarkets and limited access to convenience stores tend to have healthier diets and lower levels of obesity.⁴

Access to grocery retailers can also be difficult when relying on public transportation. Vehicle access is often the most important determinant of whether or not a family can access affordable and nutritious food. Unsurprisingly, households without access to a vehicle are more prevalent in low-income areas.⁵ For rural and suburban communities where supermarkets are often more than 10 miles away, long-travel distances and commute times can be a disincentive to seeking out healthier options.⁶

Quality: Low-income households often sacrifice food quality for food quantity, which results in more health problems caused by poor nutrition.⁷ Limited access to health food choices can also lead to poor diets, higher levels of obesity and other diet-related diseases, as well as stress and poor mental health due to the financial and emotional pressure of food insecurity (among other factors).⁸ Nutritionally inadequate diets also can negatively impact a child’s mental development and learning capacity.⁹

Feasibility: Additionally, food assistance programs’ budgets build into their models the expectations that an individual has sufficient time to prepare foods from scratch, far exceeding social norms and expectations for food preparation and cooking. Federal food assistance household heads are mainly seniors, people with disabilities, workers, and working parents for whom lengthy hours of food preparation are impractical.¹⁰

Effects on Youth

Only approximately 1/4 of Snohomish County students eat more than 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day.¹¹ Proper nutrition is critical to learning capacity and mental development.

The USDA estimates a family of 4 with two school-aged children could spend as much as \$1,268.10 per month on food¹², nearly triple the amount that family could receive in federal food assistance.¹³

Nearly 44,000 (43%) of K-12 students in Snohomish County are enrolled in Free/Reduced Lunch Program.¹⁴ For many, lunch is their only nutritious and reliable meal of the day.

As much as 15% of surveyed Snohomish County students reported having to skip meals at least some months or more due to financial constraints.¹⁵ Skipping meals negatively impacts the way a child functions at school and, as a result, could have a potentially damaging impact on their future productivity.

Only about 10% of eligible students' access summer food programs.¹⁶ Low-income families with school-age children often lack other options to access and obtain nutritious meals in summer months when meals are not provided by school-based lunch programs.

The WIC program served 21,612 people in 2015, and 59% of families receiving benefits were living in poverty.¹⁷ Strong early nutrition is essential to infant and childhood development and can affect health into adulthood.¹⁸

Effects on Adults

In 2014, 88,400 (12%) Snohomish County residents experienced food insecurity. 62% have incomes below 200% of the poverty threshold, making them likely eligible for federal nutrition assistance.¹⁹

Among surveyed Snohomish County residents, 37% say that they needed help obtaining enough food in the past year.²⁰

Nationally, about 93% of pantry-client households and 86% of kitchen-client households have mean monthly incomes at or below 130% of the poverty line, yet less than 1/2 of pantry-client and about 1/3 of kitchen-client households received welfare benefits.²¹

About 10% of Americans live in communities that lack adequate access to healthy food retailers, such as supermarkets, within a reasonable distance from their home. These communities are more likely to be low-income and to be people of color.²²

Federal food benefit participants spend an estimated 10.5 hours per week in food production and cooking, as much as 82% more than the social norm, creating an additional time cost to recipient families.²³

47% of pantry clients and 36% of kitchen clients doubted eligibility for food stamps. 12% did not know how to get benefits.²⁴

110,924 Snohomish County residents receive Basic Food assistance. This is more than 2/3 of all clients served by DSHS in Snohomish County.²⁵

Effects on Seniors

Only 43% of Snohomish County seniors²⁶ eat 2 or more servings of fruit daily; 31% eat 3 or more servings of vegetables daily.²⁷ This means as many as 46,000²⁸ seniors are lacking appropriate daily nutrition, which is critical to overall health, functioning, and quality of life.²⁹

A food plan for a senior couple³⁰ can average as much as \$700.00 per month,³¹ nearly 1/3 of their overall Social Security benefit.³²

Nationally, 42.8% of seniors lived more than 1 mile from the nearest supermarket in 2010; in Snohomish County, that would include nearly 35,000 seniors.³³ The more stores located within a mile of a person's residence, the greater the likelihood of them eating more servings of fruits and vegetables per day.³⁴

In 2014, 10% of federal food assistance recipients were elderly adults.³⁵ Yet the percentage of eligible households that participate in SNAP (known as the *take-up rate*) is relatively low for elderly adults at only 41%. Factors contributing to low participation rates include, complexity of enrollment, misperceptions about benefit amounts, and cultural beliefs about receiving benefits.³⁶

73% of seniors and disabled adults receiving program meals were at high nutritional risk. Meals served provide an estimated 40-50% of the participants' required daily nutrients.³⁷

Other Populations of Interest

Tribal Populations: 15 out of 22 Native American reservations in Washington State do not have an on-reservation supermarket or grocery store; the cost of shopping at off-reservation supermarkets is about 7% higher than the national cost.³⁸ 43.6% of low-income tribal area populations live more than 1 mile from a supermarket and almost 1/3 of low-income tribal area populations travel at least 10 miles or more to the nearest supermarket. Rural tribal households without access to a vehicle (10%) were nearly 10 miles from the nearest supermarket and 31.3% were more than 20 miles from the nearest supermarket, further limiting adequate access to food retailers.³⁹

Communities of Color: From 1997-2008, predominately African-American neighborhoods and low-income neighborhoods had the smallest increase in food store availability and the greatest reduction in the number of available grocery stores.⁴⁰ As a whole, minorities are overrepresented in food benefit programs. While about 21% of Snohomish County's residents are minorities⁴¹, 36% of the county's Basic Food participants are minorities.⁴²

Strategies in Practice

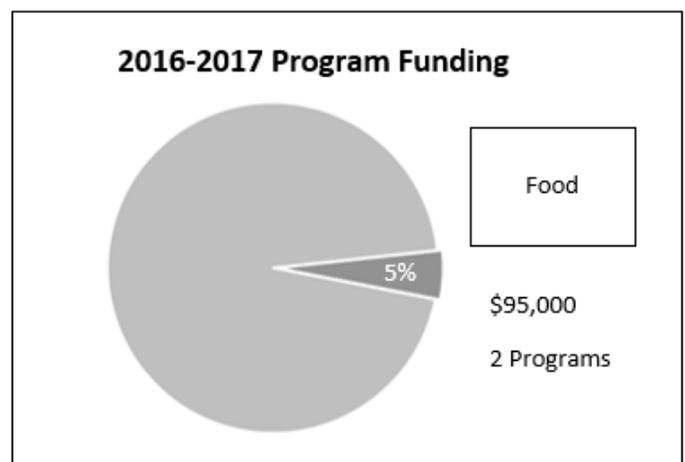
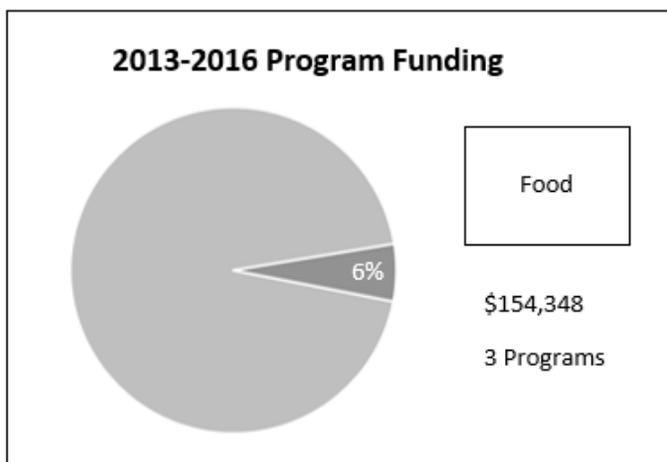
Communities with accessible and healthy food resources possess: 1) convenient physical access to grocery stores; 2) prices that make healthy choices affordable and attractive; 3) a range of healthy products available; and 4) adequate resources for consumers to make healthful choices, including access to nutrition assistance programs to meet the needs of low-income residents.⁴³

The most effective food banks are responsive to their client's lifestyles: they offer culturally and age-appropriate food options, give clients freedom over the foods they select, and are accessible to clients with differing geographic, transportation, work schedules, and language needs.⁴⁴

Effective programs reach a wide variety of types of people in need and offer more than just basic food resources, including food delivery and social outreach,⁴⁵ health and nutrition education, and information and training on how to prepare and obtain nutritious food⁴⁶

Strong summer childhood hunger programs: 1) combine a food and nutrition program with special activities for children; 2) have a strong outreach component; 3) target special populations to receive services, and 4) offer nutritious meals that are appealing to children.⁴⁷

Past United Way Funding



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² "Replacing the Thrifty Food Plan in Order to Provide Adequate Allotments for SNAP beneficiaries," *Food Research and Action Center*, December 2012, accessed January 14, 2016, http://frac.org/pdf/thrifty_food_plan_2012.pdf.

³ "About our Terminology," *Food Bank for New York City* accessed January 14, 2016, <http://www.foodbanknyc.org/index.cfm?objectid=3DF3397D-3048-651A-20FF8E99B81531B4>.

⁴ "Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity: IV. Access to Healthy, Affordable Foods," *Let's Move Federal Program*, accessed January 14, 2016, http://www.letsmove.gov/sites/letsmove.gov/files/TFCO_Access_to_Healthy_Affordable_Food.pdf.

⁵ "Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food: Measuring and Understanding Food Deserts and Their Consequences: Report to Congress," *United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service*.

⁶ "Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity: IV. Access to Healthy, Affordable Foods," *Let's Move Federal Program*.

⁷ "Proceedings of the Roundtable on Understanding the Paradox of Hunger and Obesity in America," *Food Research and Action Center*, November 2004, accessed January 14, 2016, <http://frac.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/proceedings05.pdf>.

⁸ "Why Low-Income and Food Insecure People are Vulnerable to Obesity," (webpage), *Food Research and Action Center*, accessed January 14, 2016, <http://frac.org/initiatives/hunger-and-obesity/why-are-low-income-and-food-insecure-people-vulnerable-to-obesity/>

⁹ "Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity: IV. Access to Healthy, Affordable Foods," *Let's Move Federal Program*.

¹⁰ "Replacing the Thrifty Food Plan in Order to Provide Adequate Allotments for SNAP beneficiaries," *Food Research and Action Center*, 2012, accessed January 14, 2016, http://frac.org/pdf/thrifty_food_plan_2012.pdf.

¹¹ "2014 Healthy Youth Survey: Youth Physical Activity, Nutrition and Sleep," *Snohomish Health District*. revised May 2015, accessed January 14, 2016, http://www.snohd.org/Portals/0/Snohd/Reports/files/Physical_Activity_and_Nutrition_HYS_2014FINAL.pdf.

¹² "Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Four Levels, US Average," *United States Department of Agriculture*, February 2017, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/sites/default/files/CostofFoodDec2016.pdf>.

¹³ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), better known as food stamps, provides an average monthly benefit of \$465/month for a family of 4 earning just \$24,600(100% Poverty). Source: "A quick guide to SNAP Eligibility and Benefits," *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, September 2016, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.cbpp.org/research/a-quick-guide-to-snap-eligibility-and-benefits>.

¹⁴ Staff calculation of free/reduced lunch students enrolled in the 15 school districts that lie within Snohomish County. Source: "Washington State Report Card 2015-2016," *Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction*, 2015-2016 School Year, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/>.

¹⁵ "Healthy Youth Survey Data" *Snohomish Health District*.

¹⁶ "Hungry in Washington, September 2014," *Children's Alliance and End Childhood Hunger Washington*. 2014, accessed January 14, 2016, http://www.wsahnc.org/download/Hungry_in_WA_2014.pdf.

¹⁷ "Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): WIC Data by County – FFY 2015," *Washington State Department of Health*, 2015, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/960-221-2015WICDataByCounty.pdf>.

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²⁰ "2015 Snohomish County Low-Income needs Assessment," *Snohomish County Human Services, Community Action Partnership Division*, 2016, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/32779>.

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²² Bell, Judith, Mora, G., Hagan, E., Rubin, V., and Karpyn, A., "Access to Healthy Food and Why it Matters: A Review of the Research," *The Food Trust and Policy Link*, November 2013, accessed January 14, 2016, http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/GROCERYGAP_FINAL_NOV2013.pdf.

²³ "Replacing the Thrifty Food Plan in Order to Provide Adequate Allotments for SNAP beneficiaries," *Food Research and Action Center*, 2012, accessed January 14, 2016, http://frac.org/pdf/thrifty_food_plan_2012.pdf.

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- ²⁵ “DSHS Client Services: Snohomish County: July 2015-June 2016,” *Washington State Department of Social and Health Services*, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://clientdata.rda.dshs.wa.gov/Home/ShowReport?reportMode=2>.
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- ²⁷ “Healthy Aging Data Portfolio Location Summary: Seattle-Bellevue-Everett, WA,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, accessed 1/12/2016. Found: http://nccd.cdc.gov/DPH_Aging/Location/LocationSummary.aspx?State=821&Mmsa=714.
- ²⁸ 57% of 80,849, the number of seniors in Snohomish County per the U.S. Census 2010-2014 5-year average.
- ²⁹ “The Elderly Nutrition Program,” *Administration for Community Living and Administration on Aging*, accessed January 14, 2016, http://www.acl.gov/NewsRoom/Publications/docs/Elderly_Nutrition_Programs_1.pdf.
- ³⁰ 51-70 years of age.
- ³¹ “Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Four Levels, US Average, December 2016,” *United States Department of Agriculture*, 2016, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/sites/default/files/CostofFoodDec2016.pdf>.
- ³² \$2176/month for a couple; Source: “2015 Social Security Changes,” *Social Security Administration*, accessed January 12, 2016, <https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/factsheets/colafacts2015.html>.
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