



COLORADO BLUEPRINT
TO END HUNGER

A FIVE-YEAR PLAN

JANUARY 2018

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About the Colorado Health Foundation: The Colorado Health Foundation is bringing health in reach for all Coloradans by engaging closely with communities across the state through investing, policy and advocacy, learning and capacity building. For more information, please visit www.coloradohealth.org.

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|---|--------------------------------------|
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| Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing | LiveWell Colorado |
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| Denver County Human Services | The Denver Foundation |
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HIGHLIGHTS

Colorado prides itself on being one of the fittest, most active and healthiest states in the nation. Coloradans are problem-solvers, collaborators and innovators in the private, public and nonprofit sectors. As we learn about challenges that have human and financial impacts for our communities, we solve them together. Despite our national reputation as a healthy state, hunger remains a reality for too many Coloradans. Recognizing this challenge, a group of leaders came together in 2017 to develop a shared vision and actionable road map for ending hunger in our state.

WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?

Many Colorado households experience food insecurity at times during the year, meaning their access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources. Food insecurity is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Hunger is an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity.

The effects of hunger on individuals and families are far-reaching and impact communities across the state. Being food secure and having reliable access to enough healthy foods, positively influences the overall health and well-being of our neighbors at every stage of life.

WHY DO WE NEED TO ADDRESS HUNGER IN COLORADO?

Mirroring national trends, hunger is common and widespread in Colorado. One in 10 Coloradans, including one in six children and one in 10 seniors is considered to be food insecure. Children and seniors, communities of color, immigrants, people with disabilities and low-wage workers are much more likely to experience hunger.

Federal food assistance programs in the United States are the most effective avenue to alleviate hunger and supplement the food budgets of low-income families. However, enrollment of individuals and families who are eligible to participate in such programs is historically low in Colorado. In fact, Colorado has one of the lowest enrollment rankings in the United States in both the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children program (WIC), ranking 44th and 48th lowest, respectively. These programs are two of the largest anti-hunger and nutrition programs in the nation but have been underutilized in Colorado. Both SNAP and WIC generate local economic activity from grocery store sales and result in a high return on investment in terms of improved health outcomes and reduced health care costs.

By increasing SNAP and WIC enrollment, Colorado could increase local and statewide economic development by more than half a billion dollars per year. Additionally, we have the potential to realize significant health care cost savings, improve early childhood developmental and educational outcomes, improve overall health outcomes for all ages, support seniors aging in their communities, increase graduation rates and promote economic opportunity for all Coloradans.


In Colorado, it is not just the very low-income populations that experience hunger; 36 percent of Coloradans experiencing hunger earn too much income to qualify for SNAP and/or WIC. This is even more problematic as Colorado has a significantly higher cost of living than the national average. This means that more of Colorado's workforce, in higher income levels, are food insecure and need to access community food resources provided by Feeding Colorado's extensive food bank network and community food pantries to meet their family's basic needs.

The work of the Steering Committee culminated in a unified vision supported by five goals and associated strategies to end hunger in the state of Colorado. The vision, goals, and strategies in this document are intended to be aspirational in nature and seek to leverage current momentum and build on recent successes by coordinating efforts and energy.


HIGHLIGHTS

VISION: ALL COLORADANS HAVE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE AND HEALTHY FOOD IN THEIR COMMUNITIES


GOAL 1: Increase public understanding and awareness that solving hunger is vital to the health and well-being of all individuals and families, the Colorado economy and every local community.

 *Hunger is inextricably linked with health, economic security and educational attainment. However, many key stakeholders are unaware of the extent of hunger in Colorado and the many multisector opportunities for improvement. There is a need for coordinated outreach and education about hunger and its impacts in Colorado to galvanize action.*


GOAL 2: Increase the number of Coloradans who can access affordable, nutritious food in their communities.

 *For many Coloradans, healthy food may be out of reach. Our neighbors across the state should never go hungry or have to choose between food and other basic human needs such as housing or medication. Providing solutions to healthy food access in every community is critical to improving the health and well-being of all Coloradans.*


GOAL 3: Increase the number of Coloradans who can access food assistance and nutritious food through community-based organizations.

 *The network of food banks and pantries across the state provides vital food resources to Coloradans experiencing hunger, many of whom are not eligible for other programs. Enhancing their ability to respond to local needs and having sufficient resources in all areas of the state is imperative.*

GOAL 4: Maximize SNAP and WIC enrollment to propel Colorado to become a leading state for enrollment in these health and nutrition benefits.

 *Historically, Colorado ranks low in comparison to other states when it comes to enrollment in federal food assistance programs. More than 320,000 people in Colorado could benefit from SNAP and 100,000 from WIC by connecting Coloradans with the programs. The health and nutrition resources provided by SNAP and WIC significantly lower health care costs while providing economic development to local business and the ability to purchase fresh foods in local, community grocery stores and markets.*

GOAL 5: Maximize participation in Federal Child Nutrition programs, moving Colorado to become a national leader in delivery of these vital programs.

 *Schools and early childhood centers across the state have the immense responsibility of not only educating our children, but helping with food security through the delivery of federal child nutrition programs. When children have increased food security, their educational outcomes, test scores, and school readiness increase dramatically. Maximizing participation in federal child nutrition programs can ensure that all Colorado kids have the fuel to learn, live and play.*

The Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger is not only a vision, it is a call to action for individuals, communities, organizations and policymakers statewide. Ending hunger in our state is possible. It will take all of us to create positive change in large and small ways in our homes, communities, workplace, our statehouse and town halls, schools, businesses and places of worship.

Engage with The Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger and become part of the solution. The good news is that we have a solid foundation to build from, momentum and commitment ... and now we have a plan.

To see the plan and learn more, visit endhungerco.org.

ABOUT THE BLUEPRINT

In 2016, the Colorado Health Foundation invested in efforts to consolidate research on hunger in Colorado and the programs, organizations and initiatives working to alleviate hunger throughout the state. This research helped identify areas of focus to create a hunger-free state and highlighted benefits of reaching this goal for individuals, communities and the Colorado economy.

In June 2017, the Foundation convened nearly 100 key stakeholders to more closely examine the challenges of hunger in Colorado and to develop solutions. Representatives from various sectors — health care and hospital systems, state health and human services agencies, local county human services, advocacy, policy and legal organizations, community-based organizations, Feeding America food banks, foundations, businesses, consumers, and the Office of the Governor — attended this meeting and agreed that Colorado needed a road map to achieve the goal of a hunger-free state, and the idea for the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger was born.

A steering committee of more than 35 stakeholders — those working to end hunger and/or living with hunger — provided leadership to create and advance the Blueprint, enhance public and political will to end hunger, and leverage their influence to sustain the momentum toward finding solutions. At the highest level, the Blueprint envisions linking systems and solutions to create real and meaningful progress:

				
Leverage Federal, State, County, Community, School Resources	Improve Healthy Food Access	Expand Outreach and Education	Maximize Federal Programs	Strengthen Food Safety Net

We believe that hunger is a solvable challenge. We are committed to working together on tangible solutions so that no Coloradan is ever hungry.

Colorado is proud of its reputation as one of the fittest, most active and healthiest states in the nation. The state has a long history and tradition of innovation and effort toward equity in achieving positive health outcomes and quality of life. Coloradans are problem-solvers. When challenges arise, collaborators and innovators from the private, public and nonprofit sectors come together to identify solutions that will have positive human and financial impacts for our communities.

Nowhere are the results of this kind of collaboration more apparent than in health care. Since 2011, Colorado's uninsured rate has been cut in half and has reached a historic low (6.7 percent in 2015). In 2015, 94.5 percent of all children in Colorado eligible for Medicaid and/or Child Health Plan *Plus* (CHP+) health coverage were enrolled. ¹

ABOUT THE BLUEPRINT

Despite Colorado’s national reputation as a healthy state, hunger and access to nutritious food are growing issues among its population. While the state has made great strides in providing health coverage and care to residents, it lags in enrolling eligible residents in federal food programs. In fact, Colorado’s enrollment rankings in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program — two of the largest anti-hunger and nutrition programs in the nation — are among the lowest in the United States.

However, significant groundwork has been laid to propel Colorado toward success in achieving the food security goals outlined in this blueprint. A few examples of this foundational work include:

- State and county agency collaboration to implement and improve the Colorado Program Eligibility and Application Kit (PEAK), providing consumers with a simplified online application option for benefits enrollment.
- Improvement and simplification of policies and waivers that reduce barriers to SNAP enrollment, especially for seniors, people with disabilities, those with transportation-related barriers, and people experiencing homelessness.
- Technology solutions to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and cross-program access and referrals. This includes successes such as utilizing SNAP data for free school meal certification and creating an online system for client referrals in WIC, resulting in caseload stabilization for the first time in years.
- The Food Resource Hotline, which is run by Hunger Free Colorado, provides SNAP application assistance and connects households to community resources such as food pantries, meal sites, and nutrition programs. The state also has several nonprofit outreach partners assisting Coloradans with SNAP enrollment.
- Successful legislation that expanded the availability of breakfast meals in schools to support the learning environment. Over the past eight years, participation in school breakfast has increased, moving Colorado from 44th to 12th in the nation thanks to cooperation between public and private sectors.

With these successes and momentum, Colorado is well positioned to end hunger through action, policies, investments, and expanding already existing broad public support.

This document is not only a blueprint for ending hunger in our state, it is a call to action for individuals, organizations and policymakers to continue working on this solvable issue.

Food security means having “access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.”²

Many American households experience “food insecurity at times during the year, meaning their access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources.” Food insecurity is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.²

Hunger is an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity.²

Food insecurity is a leading health issue in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 12.3 percent of all U.S. households — over 41 million Americans — were food insecure in 2016. More than 16 percent of households with children reported food insecurity at some point during the year.³

HUNGER IN COLORADO

Hunger is common and widespread in Colorado.



1 in 10

Coloradans (10.35%) struggle with hunger, not always having enough money to buy food. ³



1 in 6

Colorado kids (16%) may not always know when or where they will get their next meal. ⁴



1 in 10

Colorado seniors (10.17%) struggle with having enough food. ⁵

Currently, Coloradans experiencing hunger have limited options for finding the food they need in a way that fits their budget. Federal food and nutrition assistance programs are the most effective avenues to alleviate hunger and supplement the food budgets of low-income families.

Only 6 of 10
eligible Coloradans are enrolled in SNAP.



In 2015, of the 5.54 million Coloradans, almost 15% (812,553) were eligible for SNAP, yet only 8.9% (489,906) were enrolled.⁶

Nationally, in 2012, SNAP kept 10.3 million Americans out of poverty, including nearly 4.9 million children. ⁷ Between 2009 and 2012, SNAP kept 117,000 Coloradans out of poverty per year, including 55,000 children, by providing an average of \$137.55 per recipient per month. ⁸

Although SNAP and WIC are the most effective food and nutrition programs, enrollment in SNAP and WIC can be challenging due to cumbersome program requirements, minimal access to community-based application assistance, program information that is sometimes difficult to understand and lack of transportation. Additionally, not all Coloradans experiencing hunger are eligible for federal programs and must seek assistance through community-based resources. For SNAP, the annual income eligibility for a mother with two children is \$26,556 (130 percent of the federal poverty level); the WIC cutoff for a mother with two children is \$37,297 per year (185 percent of the federal poverty level).

HUNGER IN COLORADO

Low socio-economic status predicts food insecurity and the largest federal food program, SNAP, only serves families, seniors, and individuals that are at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level. Since regional or local cost of living variances are not considered in program eligibility, the cutoff for receiving assistance is the same in every state, regardless of the cost of living. In Colorado, the cost of living is 116.7 percent of the national average,⁹ meaning more of Colorado's workforce and households in higher income levels may need to access community food resources provided by Feeding Colorado's extensive food bank/food pantry network to adequately meet their family's food needs.

Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization, published data that indicates 36% of food insecure Coloradans have income above the threshold to qualify for federal food and nutrition programs. They estimate that the annual food budget shortfall for food insecure Coloradans is \$368,403,000.¹⁰

Food banks in local communities provide vital food resources to families and individuals who are enrolled in SNAP and/or WIC and need additional resources to close the meal gap. Food banks are also the only anti-hunger resource available to individuals and families that are not eligible for Federal food and nutrition assistance programs. They serve hundreds of thousands of Coloradans experiencing hunger and struggling to meet the increasing cost of living without a livable wage.

The impacts of hunger on individuals and families are far-reaching and affect communities across the state. Being food secure and having access to healthy foods positively impacts overall health and well-being at every stage of life. Academic research links hunger to negative health and behavioral health outcomes, and food security and access to healthy foods to positive health and behavioral health outcomes.

FOOD SECURITY LEADS TO:



Reduced Obesity, Diabetes and Malnutrition¹¹



Lowered Risk for Heart Disease & High Blood Pressure^{12, 13}



Lower levels of stress^{13,14}



Decreased depression^{14,15}



Significantly lower rates of suicide in adolescents¹⁶



Decreased behavioral problems in youth¹⁷

Hunger disproportionately impacts children, single-parent families headed by women, black and Hispanic communities, seniors, people with disabilities and low-income populations. The reasons individuals and families struggle with hunger are complex and involve multiple social and structural risk factors, including household composition, low minimum wages, race or ethnicity, disability, as well as high cost of living and housing.

Ensuring that everyone has access to nutritious food leads to positive physical and mental health outcomes. Food security promotes healthy behaviors and helps address social determinants of health, such as poverty, disproportionate disease rates, high school graduation, long-term self-sufficiency and access to economic opportunities.

HUNGER IS REAL FOR HEALTHY FOOD ACTIVIST

Meighen Lovelace's activism is fueled by one part public passion and one part personal need.

Lovelace lives with her two young daughters in Avon in Eagle County. As with most resort areas, much of the work available can be temporary or seasonal. These kinds of opportunities are difficult when you also need help from federal programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. One on-call job too many, and the nutritional help goes away, leaving Lovelace with two little ones who need breakfast or dinner.

"The people who live here full time are working-class people who are struggling," Lovelace said. "I am one of the lucky ones. I have a car. I have a good education. I have a family that keeps me going. I live in a beautiful place where my kids are safe. But behind all of that, there are challenges we all face here no matter how hard we work. And we work hard. I see my neighbors getting up at the crack of dawn and coming home after dark. We are all working hard."

Her situation is not the exception; it is nearly the rule. A full 74 percent of enrollees in the federal SNAP program in Colorado are families with children. A three-person family like Lovelace's must make \$26,556 or less to qualify. Along with the paying jobs she finds and the children she is raising, Lovelace dedicates countless hours to working on food issues with the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council and the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union. She understands the larger nutrition systems picture and the real challenges around ending hunger on a statewide scale. She saw a need in her community food bank for more fresh, healthy foods, so she began a community gardening program through the local Salvation Army. She has taught her daughters to glean at available farms



"You and your kids don't just magically stop needing to eat. It almost feels like there's simply no way to get ahead. It's so hard for people who haven't walked in this space to understand. And while I'm trying to figure a way out of this place, my kids sometimes have a rumbling belly."

- Meighen Lovelace



and it has become a regular ritual in their lives. But all of this knowledge and effort doesn't always translate into reliable food for her family. When she talks about these challenges, the strain is audible in her voice.

She describes a common situation. The window to submit paperwork for SNAP is often 10 days. It is not uncommon for the paperwork to arrive at or beyond the 10-day window. Once that issue is corrected, she lands a one-night catering job at a local wedding. She reports the income from that, but for purposes of the program, it's spread out as weekly income or reported as bimonthly. She is booted off the program and often finds out when she is trying to check out at the grocery store and her SNAP card declines. She then has to go to the catering company and get a letter – or sometimes multiple letters – to clear up the issue. And the process starts again.

She is quick to point out that the rules for the federal program are difficult for communities like hers and she understands the dilemma. Her point is borne out in the data. The rules are actually difficult for everyone, especially the working class that may fluctuate based on extra shifts, overtime, or one-off catering gigs. They get extra money for the extra hours – which are never guaranteed and actually rare – but it lifts their income and makes them ineligible. In Eagle County, enrollment in the program is only 1,496 though an estimated 6,756 are eligible to participate. And while many resort counties have specific challenges with enrollment, their reality isn't that different from the challenges faced across the state. Colorado ranks 44th in the nation for enrollment in the federal nutritional program, meaning that more than 320,000 Coloradans need help but aren't getting it. This translates into a real economic issue for the state. For example, Colorado lost out on more than \$261.8 million in grocery sales because of low enrollment in 2016.

Other challenges with using the federal program are also real, especially in and around Colorado's resort communities. Feeding America, the country's largest hunger relief organization, estimates the average cost of a meal in Colorado at about \$3.09. The SNAP program provides an average of \$1.40 per meal or about \$130 per person per month in grocery assistance. While this amount prices many out of fresh fruits and vegetables across the state, it is particularly hard to make those dollars stretch in mountain towns and other communities with a high cost of living.

Lovelace understands clearly that there isn't a single solution to the issue of hunger, either in her own family's life or across Colorado and the nation. But she is doing what she can.

"I am advocating for better systems because I am advocating for the people using them. I want to normalize these conversations. We'll never find the solutions if we don't," she said. "It's not shameful to be a mother that needs to use SNAP. Or for your kids to be on free and reduced lunch. There's so much work to do. And I'm willing to keep working until we get to a better place."

To read more Colorado stories, visit endhungerco.org.

HUNGER IN COLORADO

SNAP HAS BEEN PROVEN TO:

Improve high school graduation rates by

18%¹⁸



Increase educational attainment for mothers^{18,19}



Reduce poverty by lifting an average of 117,000 Coloradans (55,000 children) out of poverty every year between 2009 and 2012²⁰



SNAP provides low-income Colorado families, children, seniors and people with disabilities with an average of \$130 per person per month to purchase healthy, nutritious foods²¹



HUNGER IN COLORADO

WHY CHILD NUTRITION MATTERS

Nutrition is proven to affect child development. Consuming nutritious foods helps children develop physically, perform better academically and have better mental and behavioral health. But at least one in six children in Colorado experiences hunger, which significantly impacts all families and communities — now and in the future. When children have access to WIC, SNAP and free and reduced school lunch and breakfast, and when they have increased food security, their educational outcomes, test scores and school readiness increase dramatically.

FOOD SECURITY FOR CHILDREN LEADS TO:

- Healthier babies, longer gestation, higher birth weights, lower infant mortality²²
- Improved educational outcomes and higher test scores²³
- Improved early childhood development and higher long-term returns on human capital²³
- Significantly lower rates of obesity²⁴
- Secure attachments and better mental proficiency at 24 months of age²⁵
- Fewer school absences and fewer visits to the school nurse²⁶



WHY SENIOR NUTRITION MATTERS

In Colorado, one in 10 seniors may not know when or where they will get their next meal. Often they must choose between purchasing food or paying for medications, housing and other basic needs. Nationally, only two out of every five eligible seniors are enrolled in SNAP, which further impacts food insecurity. The majority of seniors who do receive SNAP are very low income, with an average monthly income of just \$912. In Colorado, 25 percent of SNAP recipients are in households with seniors and/or people with disabilities.

FOOD SECURITY FOR SENIORS LEADS TO:

- Substantially lower rates of diabetes²⁷
- Significantly lower rates of depression²⁷
- Greater independence with fewer limitations on daily living activities²⁷
- Reduced rates of preventable hospitalizations²⁸
- Significantly reduced health care and Medicaid costs²⁸
- Lower rates of nursing home utilization²⁸





HUNGER TOUCHES COLORADO SENIORS AFTER A LIFETIME OF WORK

Tom and Loyola Quintana have worked hard all their lives.

If you visit the couple's Greeley home, it's easy to see the twin pillars that have supported and encouraged them through their 51 years of marriage: family and faith. Both 80-year-old Tom and 81-year-old Loyola maintained full-time jobs, including Tom's 14 years of service in the U.S. Army. Both retired in their 70s with small pensions and Social Security.

Like many seniors on fixed incomes, constant increases in the cost of living like heat and electricity, along with unexpected and expensive illnesses like Tom's battle with cancer and his recent strokes, have eaten into the small nest egg they were able to build. Like one in every 10 Colorado seniors, the Quintanas know what hunger is. They get help from the Weld Food Bank.

"You don't want to be doing it, but if you have to, you have to," Loyola said. "It's what keeps us from turning off the heat or going without some of Tom's medicines he needs."

The Quintanas' story isn't unique for Erika Westfall, the manager of senior outreach for the food bank, which serves 2,900 seniors living primarily in Weld County.

"We see this all the time. They worked hard their whole lives, but the lower wage jobs they worked leave them with little Social Security to rely on," Westfall said. "They didn't have a lot of excess income during their working years, so building up a large savings to see them through wasn't possible. Then a health issue happens and the medical bills pile up. Now they are faced with terrible choices."

To accommodate the variety of seniors and their needs, the food bank has a food pickup option and provides delivery for those who are homebound. Many of the seniors served are living on an income no more than \$1,300 a month and often less than \$770 a month, leaving little room for the kinds of unexpected expenses that life often brings. The benefits of making sure all seniors have enough to eat are well-documented. Those who don't struggle for food have lower medical costs, less instances of depression, better management of chronic diseases and fewer limitations on their daily activity.

"We sometimes struggle to give seniors help with food. These are proud people who don't want help or think help should be saved for someone who needs it more," Westfall said.

For Loyola, the food bank brings a particular benefit for her and her four children, nine grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. According to her family, no one makes green chili and sweet rice like she does. "They always order sweet rice when we all get together. They say no one makes it better than me. And I figure, I'm older than the hills and twice as dusty, so who is going to argue?" Loyola said, her laugh echoing across her kitchen.

To read more Colorado stories, visit endhungerco.org.



Coloradans care about hunger, believe that it is a problem we should solve as a state and agree that government programs that help to solve hunger are important, according to a recent Hunger Free Colorado poll.²⁹



5 of 8

Colorado voters consider hunger to be a very important issue.

2 of 3

Voters oppose efforts by the federal government to cut programs that address hunger.



HUNGER IN COLORADO

FOOD SECURITY AND OUR ECONOMY

Every year hunger costs the U.S. economy at least \$77.5 billion in health care costs through higher rates of chronic disease, higher utilization of health and mental health care services, more frequent and high-cost hospitalizations and more frequent use of nursing homes.³¹ On the flip side, food security has an immensely positive economic benefit: It reduces health care costs; stabilizes the workforce; and helps to prevent and manage expensive chronic diseases related to obesity, diabetes, malnutrition, heart disease and high blood pressure. A federal study of the WIC program showed that for every \$1 invested, the health care system alone saves \$2 by age one and \$4 by age 18.³² Similarly, research has demonstrated a reduction in health care costs of \$1,400 per person per year among low-income adults who also receive SNAP benefits, a finding that indicates state Medicaid programs could see significant savings from increased SNAP participation.³³

“Food security is the condition in which all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”³⁰

SNAP and WIC benefits, along with the health care cost savings as a result of food security, positively affect Colorado’s economy. The Public Health Institute puts the health care costs of food insecurity in Colorado between \$1.02 billion and \$2.1 billion each year.³⁴ The positive economic impact of SNAP and WIC is currently about \$1.4 billion a year; with increased enrollment, Colorado could realize an additional \$500 million in economic activity in communities across the state. These figures do not account for cost savings in other areas such as education, corrections, child welfare and workforce, nor the positive economic impact of other federal food and nutrition assistance programs and the financial impact of food banks to local economies.

In 2016, Colorado SNAP recipients spent more than \$728 million in local grocery stores. However, nearly \$262 million in benefits were left on the table due to low enrollment.³⁴



In 2016, SNAP created over **\$1.3 billion** in local economic development. Higher enrollment in the program would have pumped another **\$445 million** into local economies.³⁵ Every **\$1** in WIC benefits saves the health care system alone **\$2** within the first year and **\$4** by age 18.³⁶

Low income adults who are also enrolled in SNAP spend an average of **\$1,400 less per person** per year in medical costs.³⁷



Cost models predict that annually, Colorado experiences **\$1.02 billion to \$2.1 billion** in health care costs alone due to food insecurity.³⁸

In 2016, Colorado WIC recipients spent approximately **\$50 million** in local grocery stores, generating at least **\$90 million** in local economic development. Increased enrollment could generate another **\$25 million** in grocery sales for nutritious foods that would generate another **\$45 million** in local economic development.³⁹



VISION AND GOALS

All Coloradans have access to affordable and healthy food in their communities.

This vision emphasizes that no matter where you live in the state of Colorado, you should have access to affordable and healthy food. For this vision to become a reality, five aspirational goals are prioritized:



Increase public understanding and awareness that solving hunger is vital to the health and well-being of all individuals and families, the Colorado economy and every local community.



Increase the number of Coloradans who can access affordable, nutritious food in their communities.



Increase the number of Coloradans who can access food assistance and nutritious food through community-based organizations.



Maximize SNAP and WIC enrollment to propel Colorado to become a leading state for enrollment in these health and nutrition benefits.



Maximize participation in Federal Child Nutrition programs, moving Colorado to become a national leader in delivery of these vital programs.

DENVER NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDS ITS OWN FOOD FUTURE

Like a busy little bee, the little red-haired girl flits through the garden from plant to plant. Rather than extracting nectar from each blossom and spreading pollen from plant to plant, she's popping ripe cherry tomatoes and succulent strawberries into her mouth and calling to her friends to try some too. Four-year-old Khaleesi is accomplishing exactly what the Montbello Urban Farm set out to do in this neighborhood where access to fresh, healthy food is limited. She is learning where her food comes from by growing and harvesting it; eating fresh, healthy vegetables; and sharing with her friends and family.

Her dad, Austin Chitwood, is the manager of The Urban Farm at Montbello. Chitwood tends the 10,000-square-foot garden, teaches residents about growing food, supervises volunteers and wages war with the never-ending onslaught of weeds.

"The best part of the Farm is watching things grow and mature and seeing the kids as they make their own discoveries about the seeds they plant. As a teacher, it is rewarding to see the excitement that comes from learning the rules of physics simply by digging a trench to see where the water flows," Chitwood said.

The Urban Farm at Montbello is in its third year and is managed by Children's Farms of America, which helps neighborhoods establish their own unique farm where their children learn about and then grow food for themselves and for their community.

One of the organization's goals is to work in communities where children and their families have limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables due to lack of close proximity to a full-service grocery store and limited family income. In this Denver neighborhood of 35,000 residents, one in four adults one in two children live farther than one mile from a store with healthy, nutritious food. That translates to many families relying on a corner convenience store or a strip of fast food restaurants to meet their nutritional needs.





Another goal of the effort is to address the health disparities that affect many residents in the community. According to the 2014 Health of Denver Report, 22 percent of public school children in Montbello neighborhoods are obese, 6 percent higher than Denver overall. Obesity in childhood is a predictor for obesity in adulthood, and obesity in adulthood is a predictor for prediabetes and diabetes. These unhealthy conditions are completely controllable through good nutrition, food security, and physical activity.

The Montbello Urban Farm provides opportunities for youth and adult groups and individuals to volunteer throughout the growing season. Chitwood noted that volunteer opportunities range from intense physical labor of moving soil and rocks to pulling weeds and cultivating around tender seedlings. For those whose knees don't hold up to long periods of kneeling, chairs can be pulled up to free-standing grow boxes for weeding and pruning herbs. In 2016, 289 volunteers contributed 2,323 hours of sweat equity.

The Montbello Urban Farm grows food for the community and distributes it biweekly through a collaboration with Food Bank of the Rockies. Several thousand pounds of fresh vegetables are distributed throughout the growing season. The program hosts an intergenerational farm camp each July. Children and grandparents attend the camp together, sharing garden chores and learning about healthy eating. Once a week the kids and their grandparents cook a meal from garden-harvested food. The children take home the same ingredients so they can prepare the recipes for the rest of the family.

The final goal of the effort is to promote the spread of these small urban farms throughout the Montbello community in partnership with several neighborhood schools and churches. The Urban Farm at Montbello exists through the generous dedication of land adjacent to the United Church of Montbello. At a recent meeting of the church's leadership council, discussions revolved around expanding the farm. With luck and perseverance, a year-round greenhouse and food co-op could be in the community's future.

To read more Colorado stories, visit endhungerco.org.

VISION AND GOALS

THE PATH FORWARD

The Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger steering committee developed five aspirational goals to support the overall vision that “All Coloradans have access to affordable and healthy food in their communities.” The goals are complimentary and dynamic. To achieve them, Colorado’s values of collaboration, innovation, equity and tenacity will need to be coupled with continued and expanded cooperation and partnerships between sectors, stakeholders, local and state government, foundations, nonprofits, consumers, advocates and elected officials.

Information on each goal follows, including a description of key programs and systems that are engaged in hunger solutions as well as changes, improvements, priorities and investments to improve the health and quality of life for all Coloradans. These goals are high level with many supporting strategies to spur ongoing and future development of work plans, tactics, measurable outcomes and analysis.

Moving forward, the steering committee will turn its attention to *educating* Coloradans about the problem of hunger; *organizing* Coloradans around policies, programs and investments that will help put the state on the path to achieving the Blueprint goals and working with decision-makers and communities to *take action*.

GOAL 1:

Increase public understanding and awareness that solving hunger is vital to the health and well-being of all individuals and families, the Colorado economy and every local community.

Hunger is inextricably linked with health, economic security and educational attainment. However, for too long this issue has not received the focus it deserves. In fact, many key stakeholders were unaware of the extent of hunger in Colorado and the many multisector opportunities for improvement.

Hunger is a **nonpartisan** issue with widespread support.

Data from Hunger Free Colorado’s third statewide survey of voter perspectives on hunger continues to uncover the same clear insight: “Voters of all stripes want stronger, smarter programs to address and eradicate hunger. They understand that working people struggle to make ends meet and recognize that bad luck or a downturn in the economy can affect anyone. The poll also shows that **Colorado voters want solutions and progress that ensures programs like [SNAP] are as effective as possible**, perhaps because they might need to rely upon such support to weather an unforeseen storm themselves.”

hungerfreecolorado.org/colorado-voters-care-about-hunger/⁴⁰

VISION AND GOALS

Colorado has a long history of coming together to solve big issues and challenges that impact the health and well-being of its residents. In recent years, stakeholders have successfully collaborated to improve access to health care and health coverage. Now our state has one of the highest rates of health coverage in the country. This success involved key stakeholders from across the state, including hospitals, health care systems, state and county agencies, elected officials, constituents, insurers, foundations, advocacy groups, schools and local communities. Together, they created effective strategic plans and made smart investments in technology, evidence-based practices, business process re-engineering, public education, marketing and outreach.

To combat hunger, we must employ these same, inclusive, strategic and collaborative approaches.

Where we need to go:

- Create public and political will to end hunger through varied and relevant messaging and widespread engagement.
- Elevate the public understanding of food security as it relates to positive health and mental health outcomes, early childhood development, school readiness, economic stability, health equity and overall well-being.

How we get there:

- Develop evidence-based marketing campaigns and education initiatives to elevate hunger as a solvable goal in every community. Highlight the public health, education and economic benefits of nutrition programs.
- Promote community-driven practices to understand barriers to and increase support for accessing food programs, implementing systems change and reducing stigma.
- Provide concrete opportunities for all sectors, industries and individuals to engage in efforts to end hunger in Colorado. Target audiences include state and local governments, elected officials, policymakers, health care systems, businesses, nonprofits, schools, local farmers, advocates, community organizers and consumers.
- Deepen Coloradans resolve for policy solutions to end hunger.
- Ensure that the economic and health impacts of hunger and food access are integrated into community development and local and regional planning efforts.

Colorado Solutions: Replicating Our Healthy Living Successes

Colorado made the commitment to provide residents access to health coverage and care and we have reaped positive financial, societal and health outcomes. When Coloradans understand the economic impacts, health care cost savings, and the positive impacts food security has on the health, behavioral health, child development and long-term self-sufficiency of their neighbors, we will support strategic, thoughtful investments to solve hunger.

VISION AND GOALS

GOAL 2:

Increase the number of Coloradans who can access affordable, nutritious food in their communities.

For many Coloradans, healthy food may be out of reach. Our neighbors across the state should never go hungry or have to choose between food and other basic human needs such as housing or medication. Access to affordable, healthy food for purchase varies by neighborhood, community and region. In some areas of the state, households may have difficulty in securing affordable, healthy food at corner stores and convenience stores.

Healthy food retailers are vital components of healthy communities. Grocers and other food retailers offer access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food, and support local economies throughout Colorado. SNAP and WIC authorized retailers are required to offer a wide variety of food options. Research shows that grocery stores positively impact nutrition and diet; however, upper income urban and predominantly white neighborhoods have better access to healthy, affordable grocers than communities of color, which may only have access to retailers providing processed and convenience food.⁴¹

Where we need to go:

- Ensure all Coloradans can easily access affordable, healthy and nutritious food in every neighborhood and community throughout Colorado.

How we get there:

- Build upon successful, statewide delivery systems to increase the amount of and access to nutritious, fresh foods in all communities.
- Ensure statewide accessibility to healthy foods by increasing the number of stores that accept SNAP and WIC benefits.
- Expand investment efforts and increase availability of flexible funding and financing for agriculture and fresh food retail options to support nutritious food access in underserved communities statewide (e.g., Colorado Fresh Food Financing Fund).
- Strengthen partnerships to increase commitment to local and regional food systems to meet the food needs of all Coloradans.
- Enhance healthy food incentives (e.g., SNAP Double Up Bucks, WIC Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Benefit increases) at farmers markets, farm stands, community-supported agriculture sites, and large and small grocery stores across the state to increase access to Colorado-grown produce.
- Integrate nutrition education opportunities where Coloradans access food.

VISION AND GOALS

Healthy Food Access Throughout Colorado: The Importance of a Multisector Solution

To achieve healthy food access statewide, Colorado must employ strategies that improve retail access to fresh, healthy foods while supporting local economies and financial best practices. Innovative options in Colorado exist to provide financing to healthy food retail outlets as well as mobile grocery delivery services. Additionally, there are national models for neighborhood grocery delivery that accept SNAP in food deserts (areas with limited access to affordable and nutritious foods) and local planning models that incorporate hunger and food security into local zoning to ensure access and transportation issues.

The Colorado Fresh Food Financing Fund (CO4F) has successfully provided grants and loans to new, existing and to-be-built retail grocery operations to retain, expand or develop markets in areas with low access to fresh, healthy foods. In these markets, low-income and rural shoppers have reported purchasing healthier food items. As of September 2017, 25 retail establishments and one statewide Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) received more than \$3.6 million in loans and grants for purposes such as infrastructure upgrades and increasing their inventory of healthy foods, and to open new stores and keep existing stores in operation. Because of these transactions, access to healthy foods increased for low-income Coloradans, and an estimated 296 jobs were created or retained. Nearly 60 percent of the stores supported thus far through CO4F are in rural areas of the state, providing support for local development and fresh food access. Additionally, the fund continues to receive applications for retail grocers in rural areas, which, if approved and funded, will further support statewide access.⁴²

Efforts to increase the number of stores accepting SNAP and WIC benefits yield improved access to healthy, affordable food in local communities. These funding streams currently promote local economic growth of over \$1.4 billion a year. These funds are vital to supporting grocers and local markets statewide. With increased participation in these programs, Colorado could potentially see over \$500 million in additional statewide economic development annually.

Colorado agriculture, local business leaders and farmers are critical to healthy food distribution and access. Colorado must harness the strengths of these sectors to promote and support state food producers, distributors and processors while delivering healthy food in every corner of the state.



VISION AND GOALS

Goal 3:

Increase the number of Coloradans who can access food assistance and nutritious food through community-based organizations.

There always will be a need to provide short-term food for people experiencing hunger and to bridge the financial gap between the cost of living and the availability of living wage jobs. Trusted community providers can offer more than just food, providing support for benefit enrollment, nutrition and food skills information and access to additional services, including transportation support to food banks and pantries. Emergency food resources serve all of our neighbors, including children, families, seniors, refugees, immigrants and people experiencing homelessness who are unable to meet their basic food needs. Additionally, community-based organizations provide senior congregate meals and meal delivery to promote senior health and independence.

Barriers such as transportation, stigma and geography can limit access to food. Providing all Coloradans with healthy, nutritious food increases their long-term self-sufficiency and reduces obesity, diabetes, malnutrition and stress. It also lowers health care expenses in both publicly and privately insured households.

Where we need to go:

- Ensure all Coloradans can access food assistance and nutritious food when needed through community-based food banks and food pantries.
- Ensure that information regarding community-based food assistance and food programs is easily accessible to and informed by consumers and community stakeholders.

How we get there:

- Strengthen the capacity and efficiency of local food banks and food pantries to reach underserved Coloradans through additional funding and purchasing power.
- Engage people in local communities to develop local solutions to increasing access.
- Increase local collaboration for coordinated and comprehensive solutions, building on the current, successful Feeding Colorado and food pantry distribution systems statewide.
- Increase partnerships between prepared food-producing entities (e.g., hospitals, universities, schools, senior centers and restaurants) and nonprofit food distribution sites to increase available food.
- Improve and extend current state tax incentives to local farmers who donate food by simplifying the tax credit process.
- Maximize transportation supports and sustainable community access points to reduce food access barriers in underserved communities.
- Promote community- and consumer-driven models that effectively connect people with nutritious food resources and integrates their leadership into policy and systems improvements.
- Maximize access to prepared meals by older adults and those with disabilities through enhancing congregate and home-delivered meal programs.

VISION AND GOALS

Colorado Emergency Food Services: The Importance of Strengthening the Food Safety Net

The emergency food system in Colorado now serves more people for a longer period due to increased need for support. Last year, Feeding Colorado, a network of the five Feeding America food banks serving the state, distributed 110,355,830 pounds of food throughout the state. They provided 89,853,936 meals to neighbors in need. These five food banks provide food to all 64 counties in Colorado through a network of over 1,500 nonprofit agencies such as food pantries, senior and youth programs, daycare centers, and soup kitchens. The gap between available income and necessary food to meet basic human needs is a common, daily struggle for many Colorado residents. The community-based emergency food services organizations bridge that gap.⁴³



Households seek emergency food resources when they are unable to meet all of their basic needs. For some, emergency food boxes have become an ongoing, necessary resource in providing food for their families. SNAP provides about \$1.40 per person per meal, while the average cost of a meal in Colorado is \$3.09. SNAP households redeem 80 percent of their benefits within the first two weeks of the month.⁴⁴ Colorado has very low SNAP and WIC enrollment rates, and many Coloradans, including children and seniors disproportionately, are not eligible to receive federal food programs and consistently rely on local food banks and pantries for food.



VISION AND GOALS

Food banks and food pantries across the state benefit greatly from perishable foods donated by growers, farmers, grocery stores, restaurants and institutions such as universities and hospitals. Up to 40 percent of America's food is wasted, costing the economy around \$218 billion each year.⁴⁵ Innovative food recovery can provide additional, quality food for individuals accessing food resources in food banks, soup kitchens and shelters; the availability of increased food donations can help defray some costs to these food safety net providers while making more fresh food available to consumers. Strategic investments in food recovery options will bring significant additional resources into the emergency food system.

For seniors, there are three specific community food assistance programs: Commodity Supplemental Food Program, Home Delivered Meals and Congregate Meals. These programs serve as lifelines extending the time seniors are living independently in community and at home. Academic research shows that even marginally food insecure seniors have poorer health outcomes and are much more likely to have limitations in their activities of daily living activities. In fact, being marginally food insecure is roughly equivalent to being 14 years older. This means that a food-insecure 65-year-old will have daily living limitations similar to a 79-year-old.⁴⁶

There are many opportunities to improve and redesign senior access to congregate meals and meal delivery. Nationally, as the aging population increases, states and communities are modernizing their programs and ensuring that seniors in most need receive these vital resources with particular attention to low-income, minority and rural individuals. Opportunities exist to create inter-generational meal sites that promote efficiency and community. Efficiency within these programs and the larger food system can be explored to maximize available funding and increase the number of nutritious meals provided statewide.

Community-based food resources are key to solving hunger in Colorado and must be supported through funding, strong infrastructures, public and political will, and innovation to ensure that all Coloradans have access to nutritious foods.

VISION AND GOALS

Goal 4:

Maximize SNAP and WIC enrollment to propel Colorado to become a leading state for enrollment in these health and nutrition benefit programs.

SNAP and WIC are immediate and vital health and nutrition resources. Different populations are eligible to receive these programs. Low-income women, infants and children (newborn to 5 years) are eligible to receive WIC if their household income is at or below 185 percent of federal poverty level. SNAP serves low-income children (0-18 years of age), families, people with disabilities, individuals, seniors, and the working poor at or below 130% of Federal Poverty Level. Although these programs are designed for vulnerable populations in poverty and struggling to meet their food and nutrition needs, they are extremely underutilized in Colorado.

We know that SNAP and WIC have a profound, positive impact on people experiencing hunger. By effectively delivering these programs, families and individuals experience improved financial, physical health, mental health, educational and employment outcomes. SNAP and WIC are two of the most vital programs during tough economic times. SNAP is structured so that benefits are available when eligible individuals and families need it the most, like the recent Great Recession when many Coloradans lost their jobs and homes. It is imperative that SNAP be maintained as a rapid response program that can be efficiently and effectively delivered as needed to immediately reduce hunger and poverty.

Historically, Colorado ranks low in comparison to other states when it comes to enrollment in federal food assistance programs. Colorado currently ranks 44th lowest in the United States for enrolling eligible citizens in SNAP (2015 data) and 48th lowest for enrollment in WIC (2013 data). According to the most recent USDA SNAP Program Access Index, 322,647 Coloradans could benefit from SNAP⁴⁷ and according to the most recent USDA data for the WIC program, Colorado has 102,517 residents eligible but not enrolled in WIC.⁴⁸ However, recent data from Colorado state agencies indicate that more than 500,000 Colorado Medicaid recipients are at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level and are eligible but not enrolled in SNAP.

A number of factors contribute to Colorado's low enrollment rates, including complicated enrollment processes, lack of public awareness about programs and services, stigma surrounding the programs, transportation barriers, scarcity of outreach and enrollment support in communities, as well as language and cultural barriers.

The most effective and immediate way to reduce hunger in Colorado is to improve the number of eligible citizens participating in WIC and SNAP. Additionally, coupling enrollment efforts with nutrition and food skills education is highly effective in maximizing the benefits of these programs. To increase enrollment, resources need to be invested, and collaborative partnerships (at the state and local level) must be leveraged.

Where we need to go:

- Improve the SNAP access rate to move Colorado to a top 10 performing state, including new enrollment and retention. With increased SNAP enrollment, access to nutrition education will be improved statewide.
- Improve the WIC participation rate to move Colorado to a top 10 performing state, including new enrollment and retention that includes comprehensive nutrition education and breastfeeding support for families.

VISION AND GOALS

How we get there:

- Improve SNAP and WIC outreach and delivery to all eligible Coloradans, with strategies to ensure equity to individuals with disabilities, seniors, immigrants, racial and ethnic populations, rural residents and people experiencing homelessness.
- Increase the SNAP eligibility threshold from 130 percent to 200 percent of the federal poverty level to standardize eligibility criteria and ensure that low-income seniors and low-wage workers remain eligible and enrolled, and to support consumers and counties in continuous enrollment.
- Provide outreach and application assistance to efficiently complete applications, reduce barriers and support consumers in understanding and navigating the enrollment process.
- Increase the WIC and SNAP benefit levels so that low-income individuals can afford the actual cost of purchasing sufficient and nutritious food relative to the cost of living in Colorado.
- Increase the capacity of Colorado advocacy, policy and legal organizations to positively impact state and federal legislation and policy for federal food programs.
- Improve cross-referral opportunities between state and county programs with similar eligibility criteria (e.g., Medicaid, SNAP, WIC and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).

SNAP and WIC: The Importance of Statewide Access and Enrollment

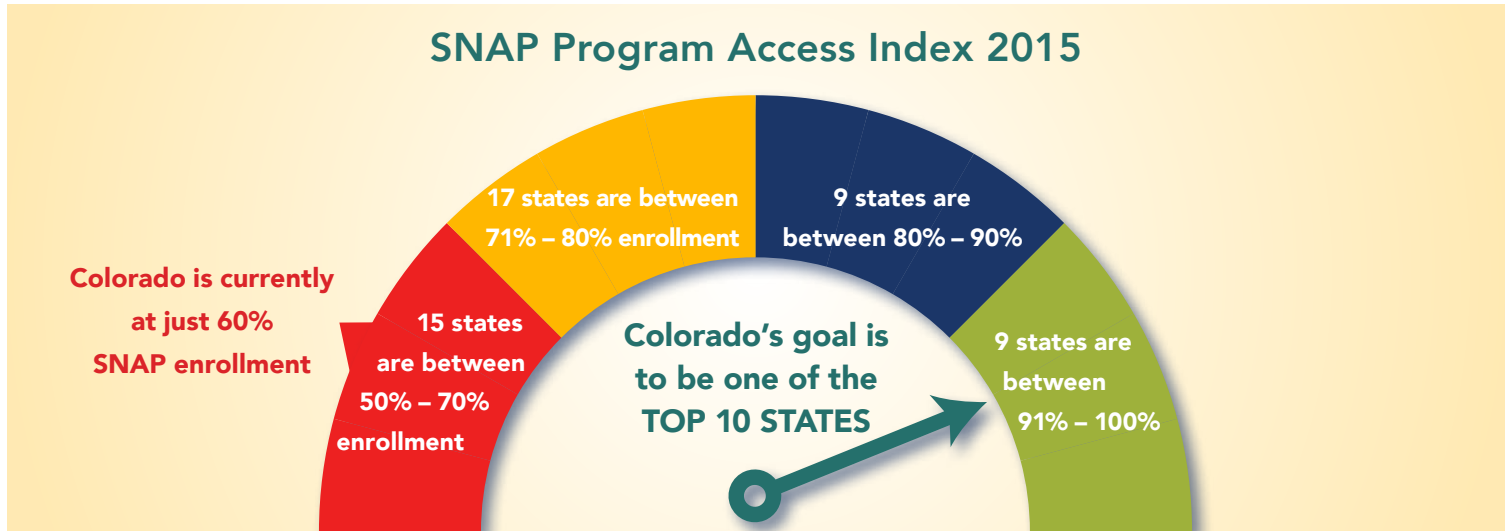
The Blueprint prioritizes Colorado's improvement and ranking in the SNAP Program Access Index (PAI), a measure of individuals who are enrolled in context with the number of individuals eligible, to rank in the top 10 states in the United States. The Blueprint also aspires to improve participation rates in WIC to propel Colorado to a top 10 performing state. Moving into this enrollment range will have immediate, positive impacts on infants and children that will continue throughout their lives.



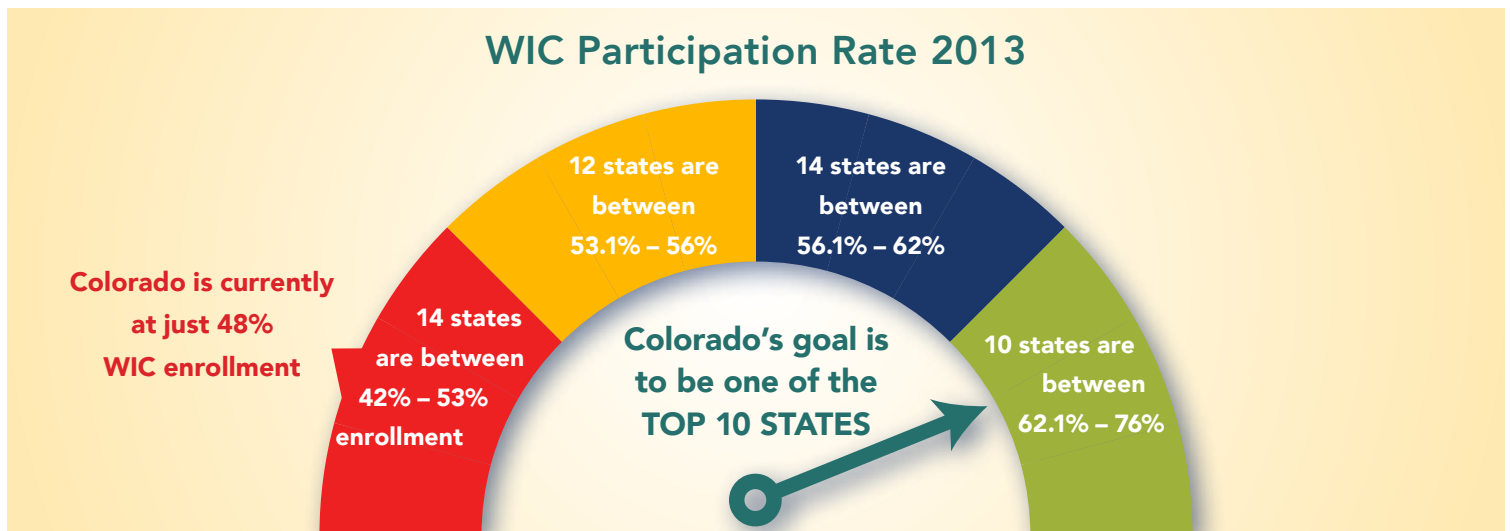
VISION AND GOALS

The health and nutrition resources provided by SNAP and WIC will also lower health care costs significantly; provide access to fresh foods in local, community grocery stores and markets; and provide economic development opportunities to local businesses. Fiscally, this strategy is a win for consumers, local communities and businesses.

SNAP Program Access Index 2015



WIC Participation Rate 2013



What Works in Colorado

Collaboration, cooperation, and innovation across public, private, and nonprofit sectors formed the backbone of the successful state health coverage expansion. The Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Finance along with county departments of human services took leadership roles in Medicaid expansion efforts, successfully managing unprecedented caseload growth in a few years. Nonprofits and health care systems partnered with the state and counties to assist with outreach and enrollment.

VISION AND GOALS

While several successful SNAP outreach projects exist in Colorado, they do not match the scale of community-based support for health coverage enrollment and must grow to support increased enrollment in nutrition benefits. Expanding on current success and creating new partnerships will propel SNAP and WIC enrollment improvements statewide.

Counties across the state have varying enrollment rates for both programs. There are myriad challenges in the SNAP enrollment system, and many relevant strategies for systems improvement have recently been outlined in a collaborative state/county analysis that included SNAP. This 2017 state human services workload analysis, an aspect of Senate Bill 16-190, outlined the benefits of improving county performance and processes, improving resource efficiency and reducing administrative costs. System and customer service improvements and working in partnership are key in our efforts to increase participation. The high-level recommendations above will improve access and enrollment, customer experience and county capacity.

COUNTY INNOVATIONS

Arapahoe County Human Services developed and implemented a state-of-the-art work management system, HS Connects. This low-cost system is saving Arapahoe County \$1.5 million per year while achieving excellent outcomes for timeliness and accuracy in processing SNAP applications. Last fiscal year, Arapahoe County was the only large Colorado county to administer the SNAP program under budget. Their successful HS Connects system is being implemented, at a very low cost, in five to eight small, medium and large counties representing over 50 percent of the SNAP eligibility staff statewide. Replicating these positive fiscal and performance outcomes across the state will help support SNAP enrollment improvements to become a national leader.

Denver County Human Services has endeavored to improve community-based SNAP enrollment through their SNAP into Health outreach program and the newly launched Denver Food Assistance Program Task Force, a local initiative with county, state, and national partners. Similarly, **Pitkin County Health & Human Services** has been and continues to engage community-based partners in developing local strategies for enrollment in benefits and access to food resources.

Larimer County Human Services is developing strategies with Colorado State University to reach hungry college students, a hidden epidemic as one in five college students is hungry and/or experiencing homelessness.

County human services departments have already been innovative in creating efficiencies and cost-containment strategies. With widespread adoption of best practices, the enrollment and cost variances can be narrowed, allowing counties to effectively enroll new eligible citizens in SNAP. As variances in cost are standardized and best practices in workflow management are adopted in all counties, the state and counties can accurately predict any additional funding needed to manage increasing caseloads effectively.

VISION AND GOALS

WIC INNOVATIONS:

Many of the state's 39 local WIC agencies have received grant support for innovation designed to increase enrollment of eligible families. WIC provides nutritious supplemental foods, nutrition education, health assessments, and health service referrals for income-eligible pregnant and breastfeeding women, infants and children to age 5.

These local agencies are implementing cutting-edge, proven and community-developed practices to reach families that would benefit from these important services. At the state level, program transformation and system improvement have led the way for success. For the first time in years, Colorado's WIC enrollment has not decreased, showing promise that this program will reach more eligible Coloradans over time.



THE IMPORTANCE OF NUTRITION EDUCATION

Nutrition education can be a lifeline for families struggling with hunger. By learning shopping, cooking and nutrition skills, families can more effectively stretch food budgets to purchase and prepare healthy meals. SNAP-Ed, the nutrition education and obesity prevention component of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), helps low-income Americans make healthy food choices on a budget, and 40 percent of SNAP-Ed participants say the program helped them reduce the number of days their families faced food insecurity during the month. The largest SNAP-Ed implementing agency in Colorado is Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters, which empowers low-income families across the state to shop for and prepare healthy meals on a budget through partnership with community organizations like Head Start, schools and health clinics.

In the WIC program, parents and caregivers are provided nutrition education through their local WIC agency. Participants meet with a nutritionist, registered dietician or other trained professional to learn, among many things, how to teach children healthy eating habits, how to shop for and prepare healthy meals and how to develop healthy behaviors. The nutrition education provided to WIC recipients is shown to improve the quality of participants' diets and to increase the purchasing and consuming of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy.

Together with other food security efforts, nutrition education ensures that families have the lifelong skills to choose and prepare the healthy food they need, every day.⁴⁹

VISION AND GOALS

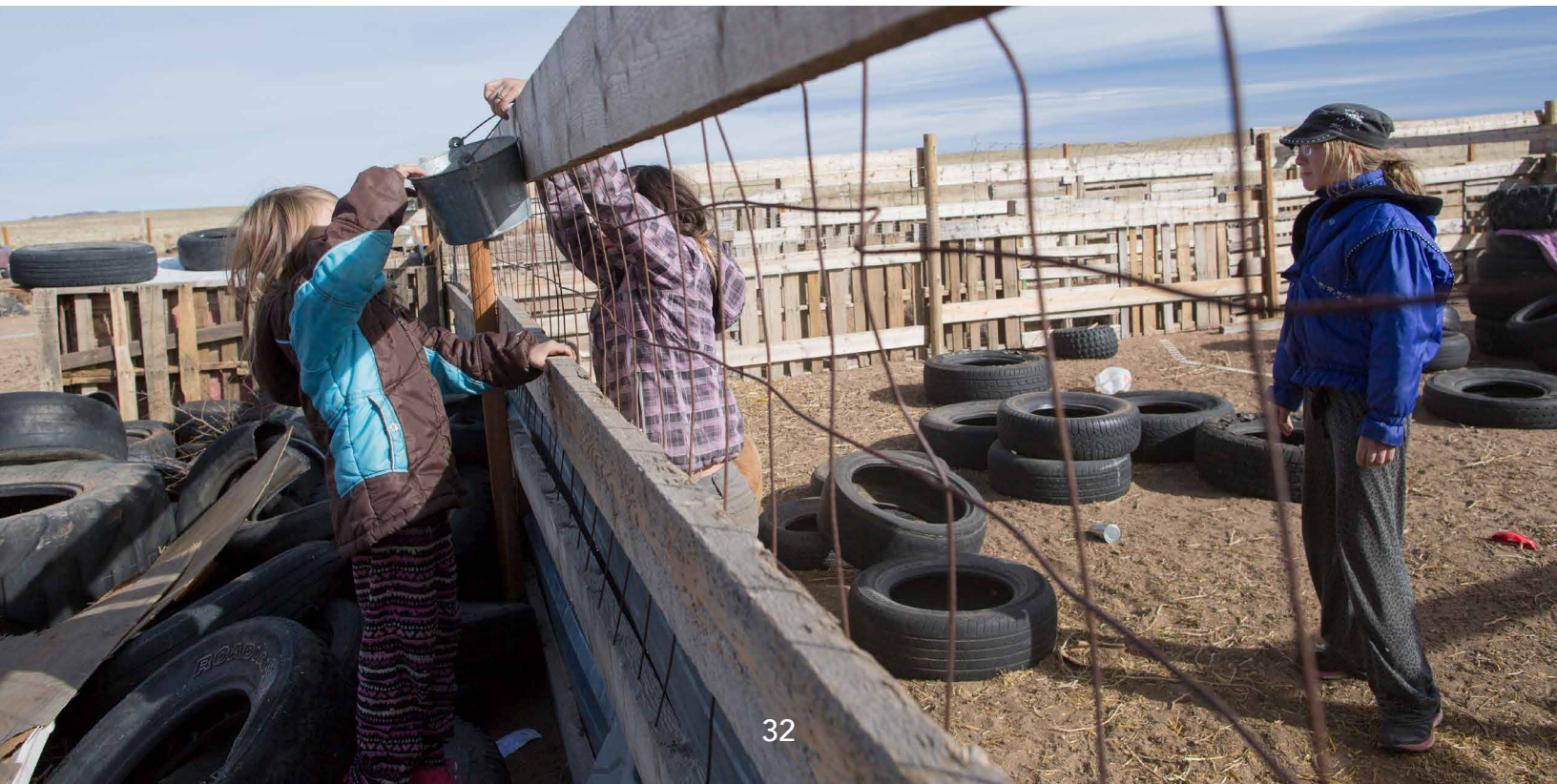
Goal 5:

Maximize participation in federal child nutrition programs, making Colorado a national leader in delivering these vital programs.

Colorado has an opportunity to invest in children by ensuring they have adequate nutrition to reach their potential. Participation in federal child nutrition programs lifts families out of poverty, reduces stress and anxiety, and improves child health and academic outcomes. Optimal growth and development in children require the adequate nutrition these programs provide. Participation in WIC and SNAP early in life reduces childhood obesity as well as decreases future risk of developing diabetes and heart disease, leading causes of mortality in Colorado. Providing school meals and snacks result in better school attendance, improved behavior and concentration, and better academic performance.

To grow and develop, children require nutrient-dense, calcium-rich foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, meat and fish, and adequate calories. Child nutrition programs can provide low-income children and youth with more than half of their daily nutritional needs and calories. Immense progress has been made in the quality of school meals provided to children with the passage of the national Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010. This act allowed for fundamental improvements and reforms to the school lunch and breakfast programs, providing higher quality nutritious foods for millions of children nationwide.

Colorado has successfully improved access to the national School Breakfast Program, ranking 12th best in the United States. However, there are significant and solvable gaps in other child nutrition programs that require our collective action. Nearly one in six Colorado kids (16 percent) experiences hunger, not knowing when or where they will get their next meal. In 2016, Colorado was the 46th lowest state for participation in the Summer Meals Program, which provides meals and snacks to children throughout the state during summer months when school-based meals are unavailable.



VISION AND GOALS



Increasing access to food and nutrition programs for children and their caregivers means healthier development, improved educational achievements, fewer visits to school nurses, fewer absences from class and higher test scores. Reducing hunger has been linked to increases in high school graduation rates, improving them by 18 percent. Nutrition in the early years means healthier physical development, reducing attachment issues and increasing mental proficiency. Children and adolescents with adequate food have fewer behavioral and mental health issues and a much lower likelihood of suicide.

Where we need to go:

Make child nutrition programs easily accessible to all Colorado kids so they have the fuel to learn, live and play.

These programs include:

- National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- After-school meals and snack programs
- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
- School Breakfast Program (SBP)

VISION AND GOALS

How we get there:

- Maximize participation, innovation and effectiveness in school-based child nutrition programs by providing technical assistance and support to all school districts.
- Expand state funding to offset caregiver copays for reduced price lunches for all grades.
- Increase capacity, collaboration and coordination of agencies, organizations and schools to ensure full-year access to healthy foods for children both in and out of school and child care settings.
- Promote the adoption of the Community Eligibility Provision by clarifying the program, increasing awareness, removing barriers to participation and ensuring fiscal sustainability for school districts.
- Ensure that school administrators, school boards, school nutrition directors, parent groups and community members understand the benefits of child nutrition programs, including the positive impacts on early childhood development, education, health and the economy.
- Develop marketing strategies that increase awareness and encourage coordination of programs and resources for child nutrition.
- Increase the capacity and collaboration of Colorado advocacy, policy and legal organizations to positively impact state and federal legislation and policy for child nutrition programs.

Child Nutrition Programs: The Importance of Widespread Access

In addition to improving overall health and education outcomes, child nutrition programs alleviate some of the financial burden of meal costs for low-income families. If children receive school breakfast and lunch, and summer meals, their family's food budget will go further, improving food quality and availability of food in the home. Child nutrition programs have a lasting impact on how children view healthy food and promote better eating habits.

The child nutrition and the food security safety net are complex with different service providers, agencies and community partners working in separate programs and offering different resources. Child care centers provide nutritious, free meals and snacks to low-income children in child care or youth centers through the Child and Adult Care Center Program. As these children enter school, they can participate in the National School Lunch Program, as well as the School Breakfast Program as available. If schools and child centers have robust after-school meal and snack programs, children and youth can receive another meal prior to returning home. During summer breaks, children and youth can access free meals and snacks through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). Unfortunately, there is a very low adoption of these programs statewide leaving children without meal coverage when there are reimbursable funding streams to provide these important food programs to hungry children throughout the state.

Colorado has the highest number of school districts in the country operating on a four-day school week. This is an additional challenge for students experiencing hunger as they may face three days without dependable, nutritious meals. By weaving together available federal child nutrition programs and community food resources, low-income children experiencing the extra challenge of a four-day school week can receive meals and snacks on the fifth day of the traditional school week.

VISION AND GOALS



CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS	AGE RANGES
WIC	Ages 0 – 5
CACFP	Ages 0 – 18 (in child care and youth centers)
School Breakfast and Lunch Program	Grades Pre-K – 12
After-school meal and snack programs	Grades Pre-K – 12
Summer Meal Program (SFSP)	Ages 0 – 18

Child nutrition programs are largely uncapped programs, providing federal funding and USDA commodity support based on the number of meals or snacks served. As Colorado increases the meals and snacks delivered to children and youth, additional funding is available to cover the majority of costs. However, investments in infrastructure improvements are necessary for school lunch and breakfast programs, and equipment must be purchased for storing and delivering after-school and summer meals. Investing in innovation, implementation of best practices, technical assistance and local capacity to expand these child nutrition programs will have an immediate and lasting positive impact on Colorado’s children.

Opportunities for the greatest improvement in child nutrition programs in Colorado are in the Summer Food Service Program, After-school meal and snack programs, the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. These programs provide healthy and nutritious meals and snacks in schools and other community sites. Maximizing the utilization of these programs by all eligible children will ensure the provision of breakfast, lunch, snacks and suppers to reduce the incidence of hunger throughout the week and over the course of the entire year.

Child Nutrition Program Participation in Colorado

2015 – 2016 School Year ⁵⁰



- **1,441** schools participated in the School Breakfast Program
- **185,045** students every day (on average)
- **80%** of breakfasts received were free or reduced-price

- **1,742** schools participated in the National School Lunch Program
- **372,736** students every day (on average)
- **66%** of lunches received were free or reduced-price
- **\$134,000,000** in federal funding for the National School Lunch Program

VISION AND GOALS

During the 2015 – 2016 School Year, 1,742 Colorado schools participated in the National School Lunch Program with an average daily student participation of 372,736 students, of which 66 percent were eligible for free- and reduce-priced lunches. The NSLP brought over \$134 million in federal funding to Colorado.⁵¹ During the same year, 1,441 schools participated in the SBP, with an average daily student participation of 185,045 students, of which 80 percent were eligible for free- and reduce-priced lunches.

Collaborative outreach and education, led by state agencies, to recruit new Summer Food Service Program sites and sponsors and to plan for expanding existing Summer Meals Programs are imperative. Increasing outreach and education on the availability of summer meals through community partnerships and public benefits will lead to increased access by low-income children.

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS EFFECTIVELY REDUCE STUDENT HUNGER

School breakfast and lunch programs provide low-income children with the fuel they need to learn, live and play. Colorado schools receive funding to offset parental copays for the School Breakfast Program for children in pre-kindergarten through grade 12. Similar funding for the National School Lunch Program is only available for children in pre-kindergarten through grade five, leaving many children in grades 6 through 12 unable to access this important resource. Many low-income students cannot participate in the school meal programs because their household income is too high to qualify for free meals, yet too low to afford the reduced-price school meal copays. An evaluation in Maryland found that students who are eligible for reduced-price meals are more likely to incur cafeteria debts and often go without the food they need to learn. In fact, these students are 26 percent less likely to eat school meals compared to students who qualify for free school meals.⁴⁹



NEXT STEPS

By design, the work of the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger is ongoing and the vision, goals, and strategies are actionable in the near and long term. Building on what we know works and what we need to create to end hunger, the Steering Committee members will continue to lead and influence high return on investment priorities, identify opportunities to do more within existing systems, and seek public and private funding to end hunger in a manner that will boost local economies, support all Coloradans, and reduce the unnecessarily high cost of hunger to health care, education, and employment.

Visit endhungerco.org



NEXT STEPS

STRATEGY

For each strategy area, action plans must be developed to drive concrete solutions. These plans must include tactics, outcomes, implementation steps, research-driven solutions as well as policy, legislative and fiscal analysis. Active engagement of diverse stakeholders and perspectives is essential.

SYSTEMS

Federal, state, county and school systems have the greatest opportunity for impacting hunger in Colorado. The state departments supervise the majority of Federal Food and Child Nutrition programs; counties, local WIC agencies, and school districts administer them. By improving cross-agency collaboration, standardizing highly efficient business processes statewide, providing capacity building and technical assistance, ensuring adequate funding and simplifying policies and procedures for consumers, Colorado will be successful.

COMMUNITY

To solve hunger, community stakeholders must effectively organize, cooperate, collaborate and leverage their resources and political will. Consumers and individuals experiencing hunger are well-positioned to lead these efforts. Food banks and food pantries must have the resources to assist their neighbors where they live to meet urgent needs. Nonprofits that serve Coloradans experiencing hunger are integral to connecting people in need with food resources and helping them enroll in benefits. Advocacy, policy and legal organizations are key to untangling kinks in the system, protecting federal programs and policies that work for Coloradans, and ensuring that basic human needs and federal programs are accessible statewide. Those working in the health fields have a vested interest in improving food security and ultimately the health outcomes of their patients and local communities. Schools and early childhood centers are crucial to positively impacting health and education outcomes for our youngest Coloradans.

RESOURCES

Our state has tremendous resources that positively impact food security, including human capital, individual and private sector wealth, and agriculture. Additionally, Colorado has the same access to federal food and child nutrition programs as other states; we are simply underutilizing these vital programs. By bringing in more federal benefits and food resources through increased participation, we will provide more Coloradans with access to nutritious food, and our local economies will benefit from half a billion dollars in additional economic development each year.

CAPACITY

To solve hunger, we need to invest in additional capacity within state and county agencies, local schools and community-based organizations. Building capacity will involve proliferating best practices; providing training and support where needed; bringing in new leaders to support our existing structure; and expanding each sector and each effective organization's ability to take on the vision, goals and strategies of the Blueprint.

FUNDING AND INVESTMENTS

This Blueprint outlines areas within the food security system that must be addressed and improved through strategy, collaboration, best practices implementation and partnerships between entities with funding and organizations and systems that have solutions. Foundations seeking to improve health outcomes, reduce hunger, promote access to basic human needs, support early childhood development, impact senior health and independence, address the social determinants of health, health disparities to improve economic well-being must integrate food security into their core grant making and make investments in the strategies outlined in this document.

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Here's What YOU Can Do To End Hunger

All Coloradans have access to affordable and healthy food in their communities.



Ending hunger in our state is possible. It will take all of us to create positive change in large and small ways in our communities, our state house and town halls, schools, businesses, and places of worship.

One out of 10 of our Colorado neighbors is hungry today. Here's what you can do:



Increase awareness about hunger and solutions within your community. If you are experiencing hunger, share your story.



Learn about hunger in your community. Look at the data, prevalence of hunger and your community's performance in addressing hunger (gapmap.org and endhungerco.org).



Talk to your neighbors struggling with food insecurity about their experiences and ideas. Exchange information about community resources and nutrition benefits.



Help set up summer meals programs for kids. Great sites include schools, child and youth centers, local parks, libraries, and for an intergenerational program, partner with a senior center!



Get involved with local schools to advocate for equal access to breakfast and lunch and after-school meals and snacks. Help your schools succeed in reaching all hungry kids!



Talk to your health care providers about the prevalence of hunger, the health impacts of hunger and how they can help their food insecure patients.



Meet with your legislators and let them know that hunger in Colorado is solvable, that the majority of Colorado voters support efforts to end hunger, and ask how they will support anti-hunger efforts.



Volunteer at local agencies supporting food security. Teach healthy cooking classes, help stock foods for your local food bank/pantry, help deliver meals to those in need.



Talk to your favorite food businesses about ways they can support your local community—by donating food and/or money and raising awareness of hunger.



Donate your time and money. Host a fundraising dinner with friends to engage your social circle in solving hunger.



Get involved with local and urban gardens and donate your harvest to local nonprofits.



Support local farmers in efforts to increase access to healthy foods. Help harvest foods. Support tax incentives for Colorado Proud food donations. Support farm-to-school initiatives.



Use your voice and your connections to raise awareness and solve hunger in your local community!

For more information on the many ways you can participate to end hunger, please go to endhungerco.org.