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# Colorado Listening Project: Perspectives of SNAP Participants and College Students to Maximize Nutrition Security





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## Overview

In October and November 2021, key informant listening sessions were conducted with 63 participants including four sessions with SNAP shoppers (40 participants), two sessions with SNAP shoppers at postsecondary institutions (12 participants), and one session with statewide partners (11 participants). In Colorado, SNAP recipients who identify as White make up 18%, compared to 39% nationally. Hispanic or Latino/a shoppers represent 9% compared to 12% nationally, and Black or African American SNAP shoppers make up 3%, compared to 25% nationally. Two percent of SNAP shoppers in Colorado



represent “Other Race or Not Hispanic”, compared to 5% nationally, while 68% of SNAP shoppers in Colorado are identified as “Race Missing or Unknown”, compared to 19% nationally. Among the SNAP shoppers who participated in the listening sessions, 50% identified as White, 32.6% identified as Hispanic or Latino/a, 7.6% identified as Biracial/Multiracial, 5.7 % identified as Black or African American, 1.9% identified as Asian or Pacific Islander and 1.9% identified as other/race not listed. Of these 63 participants, 90.3% identified as female and 9.6% identified as male. There was a wide range of ages represented, with participants ranging from under 18 to over 65. For a full breakdown of participant demographic information see Appendix A.

Participants in the SNAP shopper listening sessions hailed from one of five Colorado regions - Front Range, Southwest, San Luis Valley, Western Slope, and the Eastern Plains (see Appendix B). Eligible participants were current SNAP shoppers or had utilized SNAP within six months of the session. Simultaneous Spanish interpretation was made available. Participants in the statewide partner listening session represented eight food equity and nutrition security advocates and policy partners. SNAP shoppers received \$50 for participating in the listening sessions.

Due to the high volume of eligible SNAP shoppers who registered for a listening session but did not participate in one, a statewide survey was also launched in November. The survey contained the same questions that were asked in the listening sessions and was available in English and Spanish. One hundred and eight SNAP shoppers participated in the survey. Survey respondents received \$20 for their participation. Since the survey was closed after the listening sessions were completed, results and analysis from the survey will be issued as Phase II of this project in early 2022, and will present any areas of alignment or additional perspectives from the listening sessions.

## Executive Summary

### **Overview**

The Colorado Listening Project was a collaborative effort that engaged a variety of stakeholders across Colorado to discuss strategies to enhance nutritional outcomes in the USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in Colorado.

### **Problem**

While Colorado may have lower unemployment, a higher minimum wage, and an overall stronger economy than many states, many Coloradans are still impacted by long standing disparities in food access and grossly out-of-reach housing prices. Colorado is ranked as one of the most desirable<sup>1</sup>, and relatedly, one of the most expensive states to live in, causing affordable housing options to become increasingly difficult to find and keeping housing prices on the rise. The state’s minimum wage, average wages, and any sort of livable wage, as well as the public safety net, have not kept pace with the rising costs of local services combined with national inflation and rising food prices.

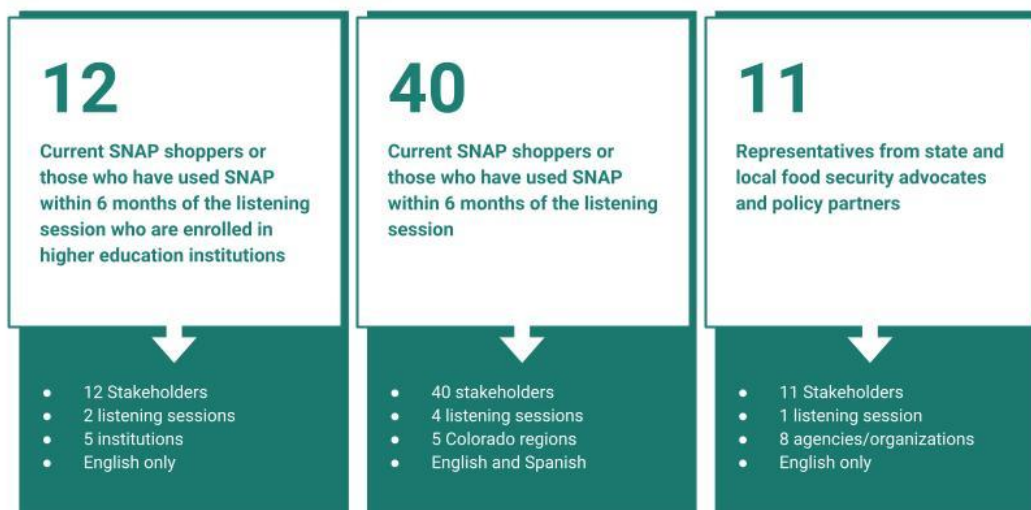
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<sup>1</sup> U.S. News\_Real Estate, December 2021

## Project

The Colorado Listening Project – a partnership between [Nourish Colorado](#) and the [Colorado Farm and Food Alliance](#) (COFFA) – supported by the [Center for Science in the Public Interest](#), was designed to build community and stakeholder support for strategies to enact policy interventions, pilot programs, and other reforms that enhance nutritional outcomes in the USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in Colorado, including exploring healthy food incentives, sugary beverage disincentives, and alternatives through a variety of activities that included:


- Listening sessions with SNAP recipients – Nourish Colorado, COFFA and the professional facilitators held six listening sessions with a total of 52 SNAP recipients, including students from several colleges and universities;
- Listening sessions with statewide food equity and nutrition security advocates and policy partners - 8 organizations and 11 individual participants participated;
- Statewide survey of 108 SNAP recipients (to be reported on in Phase II)



## Results

For each strategy, level of support among SNAP shoppers and statewide partners was gauged by the prevalence of positive and negative comments for each strategy.

Among the approaches explored, two strategies emerged with the strongest support from all SNAP shoppers and a third that was not probed with higher education students:

- 
- Allow SNAP shoppers to use their benefits to purchase hot and prepared foods
  - Increase awareness and enhance participation in the Double Up Food Bucks Program among both shoppers and vendors.
  - Additionally, all SNAP shoppers, save the higher education participants who did not discuss this, strongly supported a paired “disincentive” (higher costs for sugary beverages) with an “incentive” (lower costs for produce)

Beyond the strategies explored, stakeholders provided key insights into facilitators and barriers to accessing healthy foods and made other suggestions for how to improve the program.

We hope these findings provide direct service providers, administrators, advocacy organizations, and policy partners guidance for improving approaches, practices and policies that are driven by SNAP participants.

## Purpose Statement

The Colorado Listening Project is a partnership between [Nourish Colorado](#) and the [Colorado Farm and Food Alliance](#) (COFFA) to build community and stakeholder support for strategies to enact policy interventions, pilot programs, and other reforms that enhance nutritional outcomes in the USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in Colorado, including exploring healthy food incentives, sugary beverage disincentives, and alternatives.

Ultimately, Nourish Colorado and its partners aim to learn more about how SNAP can work better for participants, to help participants have access to all the food options they would like for the health of themselves and their families. Findings will help inform Nourish Colorado's and its partners’ advocacy efforts to improve access to nutritious foods at the state and federal level.

## Project Background

This effort is funded through the [Center for Science in the Public Interest](#) and their Healthy SNAP campaign. CSPI has provided several SNAP engagement grants to states across the country. This work is intended to inform their national advocacy campaign to drive policy change in food and nutrition. The Colorado Listening Project is a partnership between Nourish Colorado and the Colorado Farm and Food Alliance and many others to capture community and stakeholder input for strategies that could enhance nutritional outcomes in the SNAP program in Colorado.

In order to capture this input, throughout the Fall of 2021 Nourish Colorado partnered with several other organizations, including NGOs and county public health agencies, as well as individuals across the state and a professional facilitator to host four listening sessions with SNAP shoppers, two listening sessions with SNAP recipients enrolled in colleges and universities, and one listening session with SNAP agency and stakeholder partners. Additionally, Nourish issued an online survey in English and Spanish to capture

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feedback from those who could not attend a listening session.<sup>2</sup> These methods are described in greater detail below. The intent was to enter with no set agenda, but rather to listen with openness and capture authentic feedback and guidance from SNAP participants and other stakeholders on how they believe SNAP can be strengthened to improve nutritional access.

## Overview of SNAP and Healthy Food Access in Colorado

SNAP serves more than 250,000 households and 499,000 individuals in Colorado each month, providing food assistance benefits to safeguard the well-being of low-income, financially eligible households ([“Coloradans to see increase to SNAP benefits”](#), Colorado Department of Human Services, September 2021). In the fall of 2021, SNAP recipients received a 21% increase in monthly benefits from the base calculation from pre-pandemic levels, resulting in an increase of on average \$1.19 per day, and with a new maximum benefit of \$835 per month for a family of four. The increase is the result of the USDA’s re-evaluation of the Thrifty Food Plan, which is used to calculate SNAP benefits. The resulting cost adjustment marks the first time the purchasing power of the plan has changed since it was first introduced in 1975. In its re-evaluation of the Thrifty Food Plan, the USDA considered the latest available data on the four key factors identified in Congress’ 2018 Farm Bill: current food prices, what Americans typically eat, dietary guidance, and the nutrients in food items. ([“Coloradans to see increase to SNAP benefits”](#), [Colorado Department of Human Services, September 2021](#)). Colorado continues to receive the pandemic-related emergency allotment, which brings all households up to the maximum amount of monthly SNAP benefits they can receive, with a minimum of a \$95 extra benefit. At this time, the emergency allotment, unless extended again, will end in April 2022, meaning many households will experience significant drops in benefit amounts starting in May.


However, very recent studies have examined how inadequate this increase is in providing access to healthy meals. One study found that, even though this increase is significant, due to large differences in food prices across regions of the US, these increased SNAP benefits are still inadequate in some very urban and some very rural areas. This study found that in 21% of US counties this increase is still inadequate in allowing participants consistent access to moderately priced meals because SNAP benefits do not adjust for regional variations in the price of food ([Urban Institute, “Persistent Gaps in SNAP Benefit Adequacy across the Rural-Urban Continuum”, November 2021](#)).

SNAP-eligible foods include what the federal government deems foods that a household would need to prepare meals, including fruits and vegetables; meat, poultry, and fish; dairy products; breads and cereals; some snack foods and non-alcoholic beverages; and, seeds and plants. ([“What Can SNAP Buy?” USDA Food & Nutrition Service, 2021](#)). In addition to the food access that SNAP provides to Coloradans experiencing low-incomes, a produce incentive is also available to SNAP shoppers in Colorado. Nourish Colorado has offered the [Double Up Food Bucks program](#) since 2016. This statewide program has

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<sup>2</sup> Findings from the statewide survey will be analyzed and published separately





distributed over \$1.5 million in Colorado-grown fruit and vegetable incentives since its inception. With Double Up Food Bucks Colorado, participants in SNAP receive vouchers for up to an additional \$20 in Colorado-grown fruits and vegetables. When customers spend their SNAP benefits on their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card at participating farmers markets or select retailers, those food benefits are matched dollar for dollar to be put toward Colorado-grown, fresh fruits and vegetables, up to \$20 per day. Participation in the pandemic has increased 62%.


The Double Up Food Bucks program is primarily funded through the USDA's Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program Grant (GusNIP). Several efforts, however, have also been made at the state level in Colorado to increase access to nutritious foods for those experiencing low incomes. In 2018, Nourish Colorado advocated for state funds dedicated to a project that provides healthy eating incentives to Colorado's under-resourced populations. The Colorado General Assembly allocated an annual \$200,000, \$190,000 of which were distributed as healthy food incentives in the form of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares to Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) and Older Adult Congregate Meal program participants. In 2021, the General Assembly approved an additional \$300,000 for the fund, for a total of \$500,000. These funds will be used to support Double Up Food Bucks incentives as well as other healthy food incentive programs.

Other SNAP enhancements include the implementation of Pandemic EBT or "P-EBT" in Colorado. The program is a federal program created to provide additional funds for families to buy food when schools or childcare facilities were or are closed or on a remote or hybrid learning model due to COVID-19. Since March 2020, P-EBT benefits have provided access to healthy and wholesome food to more than 470,000 Colorado children who would have received free or reduced-price meals at school or in childcare facilities. The Colorado Department of Human Services has issued over \$575 million in P-EBT benefits since the pandemic began.

Additionally, Hunger Free Colorado created the Food Pantry Assistance Grant with one-time state funding in 2018. That year, the grant awarded \$451,250 to 94 food pantries (including all five food banks in the state), serving all 64 counties and more than 86,000 clients. These food pantries bought 449,185 pounds of food from 130 local farmers. In 2020, during a special session, Hunger Free Colorado secured \$5 million for the Food Pantry Assistance Grant to substantially increase the capacity of food pantries and food banks to respond to COVID-19.

There have also been local efforts to increase access to nutritious foods through policy changes. In 2018, residents of the City & County of Denver passed the Healthy Food for Denver Kids Ordinance. The Initiative increased taxes to establish a fund for healthy food and food-based education for Denver's youth. The 0.08% increase in sales and use tax within the City and County of Denver is expected to generate approximately \$11 million dollars annually and will sunset after 10 years.

Additionally, in 2016, Boulder, Colorado voters approved a sugary drink tax earmarked for health equity. Since 2017, many millions of dollars have been allocated to fund health and nutrition programs. In




December 2021, the City of Boulder approved \$3.4 million in [2022 Health Equity Fund grants](#), for community nonprofit health equity programming. Funding investments are awarded through an annual competitive process based on alignment with the intent and language of the Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Product Distribution Tax. The [Sugar Sweetened Beverage Product Distribution Tax](#) (SSBPDT) is an excise tax of up to two cents per ounce on the first distributor in any chain of distribution of drinks with added sugar, and sweeteners used to produce such drinks. Revenue collected, minus the cost of tax collection and fund administration, is awarded to qualifying nonprofit agencies and organizations, educational or governmental entities – public or private – that propose to serve city residents. ([Health Equity Fund, 2021](#)). Programs funded include those that improve access to healthy and affordable food and clean water and increase opportunities for physical activity and recreation, including significant funds for Double Up Food Bucks and produce incentives for WIC participants.

## A System That Perpetuates Nutrition Insecurity

While the increase in SNAP benefits due to changes in the Thrifty Food Plan, some pandemic-related increases in 2021, and Double Up Food Bucks are providing a stronger foundation for nutrition, several other factors are working to limit the benefits of such increases. Rising inflation, gas prices, and particularly high food prices are squeezing already-tight budgets and have a greater impact on those living with limited budgets with less room for any increases in costs. (NBC News, “[Higher Food Costs Make Math Even Harder For Americans on Food Stamps](#)”, November 2021).

Exacerbating inflation are the ongoing effects of the pandemic on household economies as well as competing costs unique to Colorado. While Colorado may have lower unemployment, a higher minimum wage, and an overall stronger economy than many states, Coloradans were not immune to drastic increases in food insecurity during the pandemic. Hunger Free Colorado found that 33% of Coloradans still reported some degree of food insecurity (lacking reliable access to nutritious foods), up from just under 10% before the pandemic hit ([COVID Food Insecurity Survey](#), Hunger Free Colorado, April 2021). The survey also found that long-standing disparities in access to healthy food have grown dramatically due to the pandemic and 43% of non-white and Latinx individuals are now struggling to put food on the table, compared to 29% of white Coloradans. The racial wealth gap has systemically hindered the economic growth of non-White populations due to unjust policies, and this extends to systemic disparities in food security that were also exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. To learn more about the root causes of racial health disparities and contributing federal policies, read the [Racial Wealth Gap Policy Packet](#) by the Bread for the World Institute. The survey also found that 44% of households with children report being unable to consistently put healthy food on the table. Forty-five percent of Coloradans identified the current high cost of healthy food as a problem for their household.

And it is not just rising food prices. Colorado is ranked as one of the most expensive states to live in - ranking #36 out of 50 in terms of cost of living (with 50th having the highest costs) and #48 in terms of housing affordability ([US News & World Report Affordability Rankings](#), 2021)). Housing prices have been rising every year for many years across the state. Fourteen percent (14%) of the state’s population earns



only minimum wage, and yet Coloradans have to earn \$27.50 an hour to afford renting a two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent and not spend more than 30% of their total income — a red line to being what the federal government calls “cost-burdened by rent” ([“Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing, National Low-Income Housing Coalition, 2021](#)). When a household becomes cost-burdened by rent, they begin to spend less on other essential items, often healthy food.


This affordability crisis does not reside in Denver alone. The same National Low Income Housing Coalition report listed three of the state’s top five most expensive areas to be mountain resort communities – Eagle, Pitkin, and Summit Counties. While home to many second and vacation homes, these are also areas that heavily rely on low-wage, service-industry jobs, therefore pricing out those who actually reside in these communities year-round from being able to afford permanent housing. As reported in 2021, “affordable-housing shortages in Colorado mountain towns have long complicated workers’ search for stability, but rising housing costs and pandemic-spurred “mountain migration” have caused a new level of desperation this year.” ([“Colorado’s rising housing prices explained”](#), Colorado Public Radio, October 2021). In early December 2021, the City of Aspen put a moratorium on all residential building permits because, as their Director of Community Development put it, “It’s not outlandish to say all our mountain communities are experiencing an existential crisis on this nexus of housing, overtourism, community identity and protecting our environment” ([“Aspen suspends new home construction permits as it drops the hammer in the name of affordability”](#), The Colorado Sun, December 2021).

As Colorado remains a highly desirable place to live, minimum wage, average wages, and any sort of livable wage as well as the public safety net have not kept pace with the rising costs of local services combined with national inflation and rising food prices. Coloradans are feeling the squeeze in metro areas as well as rural and exurban areas due to Colorado’s desirability and unique resort-based economy. Food and more importantly *nutrition* insecurity are a direct result of poverty, low wages, and inordinate costs of other essential household needs such as transportation and housing.

## Methods

### *Facilitator Engagement Methods*

Given potential bias as well as limited capacity and a lack of the needed skill set to facilitate sensitive conversations with SNAP shoppers across the state, Nourish Colorado and COFFA elected early to contract with an external facilitator or team to develop and implement the listening sessions. Nourish Colorado partnered with a team of reviewers that included COFFA staff, Denver County Public Health staff, as well as SNAP and Double Up participants to develop and distribute a Request for Proposals for facilitation. Nourish received a significant number of proposals from teams across the state and country. Reviewers were compensated for their time and reviewed, ranked, and interviewed applicants. The review team unanimously selected the facilitation team of Morgan & Rushton Consulting in July 2021 to implement the listening sessions and complete the analysis and reporting for this project.



The Morgan & Rushton team met biweekly with Nourish and COFFA staff throughout the project and monthly with the broader team that included Denver Public Health as well as SNAP shoppers to discuss project approach and to strategize on the best ways to engage SNAP shoppers in the listening sessions.

### ***Listening Session Participant Selection Methods***

In addition to seeking guidance from the review team described above, Nourish Colorado contracted with COFFA as well as three community outreach partners who were compensated to ensure locally focused, trusted outreach to SNAP shoppers for the listening sessions (see Appendix C). COFFA led outreach on the Western Slope and three community outreach partners led outreach in the San Luis Valley, Pueblo and Eastern Plains region, and the Southwest region. Denver Public Health as well as Nourish Colorado Community Food Advocates based in Denver led metro Denver outreach and engagement. Additionally, the project team worked with Hunger Free Colorado (who has studied and led outreach to students experiencing food insecurity) to tailor the listening sessions for students in higher education. Along with Hunger Free Colorado and other partners, the team recruited participants for two, student-only listening sessions.


All partners delivered clear, trusted information about the intent and process for the listening sessions, addressed technological barriers, and worked with Nourish to ensure all participants successfully received their stipends for participating.

### ***Outreach Methods***

Together, these outreach partners and Nourish Colorado developed email, print, and social media communications in Spanish and English (See Appendix C) to recruit SNAP shoppers for the listening sessions. Nourish Colorado also developed a registration form (See Appendix C) for interested participants that included questions about SNAP participation, location, and demographics. Nourish Colorado used these responses (in total, over 270 respondents for the statewide listening sessions and 21 registrants for the student listening sessions) to select listening session participants that would ensure geographic and demographic diversity, as well as primary language and immigration status.

## **Process**

Listening session participants comprised individuals who were current SNAP recipients or who had utilized SNAP within the last six months. Qualitative data was collected from online listening sessions that lasted between 75-90 minutes. Conversations flowed between English and Spanish and were semi-structured, allowing participants to respond to questions they felt moved to provide their feedback on and skip questions that were not relevant to their experience, or that they had no interest in responding to. Sessions were recorded and transcribed. Facilitators used three similar, yet distinct sets of interview questions for each session - one for SNAP recipients, one for SNAP recipients who are students at postsecondary institutions, and one specific to statewide partners. The SNAP recipient interview questions (see Appendix C) were developed through a collaborative process, with Colorado Farm & Food




Alliance (COFFA) piloting a set of questions with SNAP shoppers on Colorado’s Western Slope. Two surveys containing proposed listening session questions were developed in English and Spanish, along with a series of probes respondents were asked to address, such as “was that a good question?” and “how do you feel about how we framed the question?”. Staff from COFFA, Nourish Colorado and the facilitators then met to finalize the guide based on feedback received during the pilot test. To view pilot resources see Appendix C. The questions for the student sessions were largely modeled after the original guide, but were modified to gain particular insights into the experiences of students using SNAP. Staff from Hunger Free Colorado and Colorado State University developed the questions used during the student sessions. A similar process was used to create the statewide partner questions, with staff from COFFA and Nourish Colorado making adjustments to the original guide to best suit this stakeholder group. Each session consisted of broad, open-ended questions designed to capture qualitative feedback from each stakeholder group. It should be noted that staff from Nourish Colorado participated in the sessions with SNAP shoppers. When questions arose about the Double Up Food Bucks program specifically, Nourish Colorado staff was able to provide in depth information and links to resources. We are not sure whether having Nourish Colorado staff present during these sessions influenced participant feedback and/or the fact that the Double Up Food Bucks program was among the top two most effective strategies identified by participants. Nourish Colorado staff was not present at the statewide partner listening session.

In some sessions, where there was sufficient representation from various regions across the state, participants were placed into breakout groups to discuss challenges and recommendations specific to their geographic and cultural context. Participants in the six SNAP shopper listening sessions received a \$50 stipend for their participation.

## Findings

This section of the report will focus on the key findings from qualitative listening sessions conducted with SNAP recipients and statewide partners across the state of Colorado. While the findings from this section are not representative of the entire SNAP population for this state, nor the views of all food security advocates and policy partners, they do provide compelling insights on SNAP recipients' experiences of food insecurity in Colorado, facilitators and barriers to healthy eating and recommendations for improvements to incentive programs and SNAP policy.

At the beginning of each session, participants were asked about their perceptions of the benefit amounts received through SNAP. Interview questions then prompted an exploration of participant knowledge and opinions of various incentive/disincentive strategies. Findings from this section represent the perspectives of SNAP shoppers overall, including SNAP shoppers who are students at postsecondary institutions and the perceptions of food equity and nutrition security advocates and policy partners. In addition to answering the questions asked of other SNAP shoppers, students were asked an additional set of questions specific to their experience navigating SNAP while attending college or university.



Feedback from student SNAP shoppers are presented in the *Student-specific Findings* section of the report.

Six strategies were explored in the listening sessions. The following six strategies were explored because they each have been researched, whether through program evaluations, controlled studies, or case studies, and documented to have potential impact on nutrition. Each is explained further in the sections below.

- Double Up Food Bucks
- Extra SNAP dollars/benefits to purchase fruits, vegetables and other healthy items
- Ability to purchase hot or prepared foods with SNAP
- Universal tax paid by all shoppers applied to sugar-sweetened beverages
- Extra SNAP dollars/benefits to purchase fruits and vegetables when sugar-sweetened drinks are no longer SNAP eligible<sup>3</sup>
- Fruit and vegetable purchases are 30% cheaper and sugary drinks are 30% more expensive when using SNAP<sup>4</sup>

For each strategy, we describe the background of the strategy, main points of discussion from the listening sessions with SNAP shoppers and the main points of discussion from the listening session with statewide partners. Level of support among SNAP shoppers and statewide partners was gauged by the prevalence of positive and negative comments for each strategy.

The strategies that rose to the top (those that were asked to all stakeholder groups and received the most positive comments) were the ability to purchase hot and prepared foods and the Double Up Food Bucks program. Additionally, all SNAP shoppers, save the higher education participants who did not discuss this, strongly supported a paired “disincentive” (higher costs for sugary beverages) with an “incentive” (lower costs for produce).

## Benefit Amounts


### Background

As detailed in the SNAP overview above, SNAP benefit amounts have long been insufficient to meet nutritional needs of participants, and often run out before the end of the month. SNAP benefits did increase somewhat in the pandemic from an average benefit of about \$4 per day (\$121 per month) to \$157 per month. Partners still want to understand if these shifts are allowing households to purchase the foods they need and want. SNAP shopper listening sessions opened by asking participants whether they felt that their current SNAP dollars met their family’s nutritional needs. Statewide partners, as with many of the questions posed to them, responded anecdotally based on conversations with SNAP users. It is important to note that we did not query participants specifically on benefit amounts, and did not consider benefit amounts a specific strategy to probe. Here we highlight the discussion that naturally

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<sup>3</sup> This strategy was not explored in the listening sessions with students as advisors in higher education and at Hunger Free Colorado recommended against it.

<sup>4</sup> This strategy was not explored in the listening sessions with students



emerged in listening sessions related to benefits outside of specific strategies discussed below, as this is critical context for any SNAP policy changes.

### SNAP Shopper Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ When asked if their SNAP dollars met their families nutritional needs, the overwhelming majority of participants said no or not completely.
- ❖ The increase in benefits given due to COVID was mentioned as helping tremendously, with many noting that without the increase, their SNAP benefits would not meet their family's needs.
- ❖ Participants shared the following reasons for why they felt their monthly allotment was not sufficient: 1) SNAP does not meet the needs of people who have special dietary needs, 2) options are limited for people living in rural areas and the cost of fresh produce is generally more expensive in smaller stores versus what people can buy in big box stores in larger towns/cities, 3) inflation and the compounding impact of increasing housing costs in the state, 4) the benefit amount does not reflect the number of people in the household due to eligibility requirements.

*“Yes, it helps a lot, but not completely. If I buy vegetables and fruits I could not do it without the help.”  
-SNAP shopper*

*“Normally no, but since we’ve been receiving the additional [COVID] funds it has gotten better.” -SNAP shopper*

### Statewide Partner Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ Partners agreed that the increase in SNAP benefits during the pandemic was instrumental in helping SNAP recipients afford healthy food as well as offset the costs of other expenses such as health care and housing.


*“As they are currently structured with folks receiving the max benefit for the eligible household size, I've heard amazing feedback. For the first time, clients have been able to have three meals a day, for the first time they have been able to build up from bare shelves, for the first time they have been able to manage disability. It has been fantastic because it has bumped things up from what was prior to the pandemic about \$1.33 per person per meal in Colorado.” -Statewide Partner*

*“Several patients on disability and prior to the pandemic were getting \$19, and now they are getting the full allotment. They can actually buy food now and get fruits and veggies. We've had people that we've reached out to who have never ever had assistance before and when we tell them about the possibilities, they are like ‘Oh my gosh, I had no idea that I could get this. This could help me with my health concerns because I haven't been able to get what I need’ -Statewide Partner*

## Ability to purchase hot or prepared foods with SNAP

### Background

Currently, SNAP participants are not permitted to use SNAP benefits to purchase items that are hot at the point of sale. SNAP eligible items are detailed by the USDA on their page [“What Can SNAP Buy?”](#). However, the USDA has a precedent of granting waivers to states in times of disaster to allow SNAP



recipients to temporarily use their benefits on hot foods. Some SNAP organizations have long advocated for changes in benefits to allow the purchase of hot foods for more flexibility for people who are under-housed and time-limited. CSPI and others are committing more time to understand, from SNAP participants' perspectives, what the opportunities and challenges might be to changing this policy. Participants were asked whether they should be able to purchase hot and prepared foods with their SNAP benefits, what kinds of hot or prepared foods they would buy, and whether this option would help them eat healthier.

### SNAP Shopper Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ There was overwhelming support for this strategy.
- ❖ Positive comments included the time and convenience it would afford shoppers, especially single parents and students.
- ❖ Shoppers noted that this strategy would increase access to full meals for the elderly, people with disabilities, unhoused people or others without access to a kitchen whose options might otherwise be limited to packaged or “snack” foods.
- ❖ There were mixed opinions that this strategy would contribute to people making healthier choices.
- ❖ Participants most often noted that they would buy rotisserie chicken if this option were available. Additionally, they noted other hot/prepared foods like pizza, pasta, deli meals and items from the hot bar and salad bar.
- ❖ For those who would not use SNAP benefits to purchase hot or prepared foods, most said that they would not want to limit others' ability to do so.

*“I have a disability that makes me essentially homebound like 95% of the time. I can't drive. The only time that I am able to like get out and about is if someone else will take me. That makes using SNAP benefits really hard. Because it's hard to access them and additionally because I have a fatigue-based condition it's very hard to find the energy to like prepare meals and stuff like that. So I think that it absolutely is very crucial that the benefits, you know, can be used for prepared meals and hot meals.” -SNAP shopper*


*“Folks on SNAP have lower incomes which in turn means that they typically work longer hours or multiple jobs. Being able to get something on the go would be very helpful especially with families. I've heard a lot of families say it's rough to have kids being on the go and providing them a good meal.” -Student SNAP shopper*

*“Yes, it's important to consider the time expense that goes into preparing healthy meals. It's not feasible to spend an entire day meal-prepping for an entire week. Also, students living in dorms have limited access to a kitchen for food preparation. My grocery store has a hot bar I would use.” -Student SNAP shopper*

### Statewide Partner Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ Similar to feedback from SNAP shoppers, there was overwhelming support for this option.
- ❖ As with SNAP shoppers, positives included convenience, time saved, and increased accessibility for those who have difficulty or are unable to cook for themselves.



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- ❖ Concerns centered around the administrative challenges of implementing this option as well as uncertainty about “boundaries” or reach, i.e. in addition to being able to purchase hot and prepared foods from grocery stores, they questioned whether shoppers would also be able to use their SNAP benefits at restaurants or to buy fast food.

*“This should definitely be accessible. As a prior SNAP recipient it was hard as a single mom to pick up something and having to pick up the cold stuff. I was able to make it work, but it would be beneficial. It would be nice to find a way for it to be [used to buy] healthier foods. I wouldn’t want it to be for fast food.”  
-Statewide Partner*

*“We know from a lot of participant listening that you know, saving time and saving money and feeding kids are some of the biggest challenges that our participants face...We, all who have kids, work jobs, feel stretched for time and sometimes those prepared foods or like foods that are on their way to be put on the table are hugely helpful and beneficial. So I do see the pro of this. You know I start to formulate questions in my head, then, about if this is the direction that SNAP is heading then do restaurants start accepting SNAP benefits and like do fast food start accepting SNAP benefits? And then how does that impact the use of SNAP and also the health of the families that use the program?” -Statewide Partner*

## Double Up Food Bucks

### Background


The Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB) program was described to participants by telling them that some stores and farmers markets offer Double Up Food Bucks to bolster SNAP dollars for shoppers to buy fresh fruits and vegetables—which means that for every SNAP dollar that you spend, you get an extra dollar to spend there on fruits and vegetables. They were then asked a series of questions designed to gain insights into shoppers’ knowledge of Double Up Food Bucks, their experiences with the program, how it affected their purchasing habits and whether the program was perceived as being beneficial. Double Up Food Bucks is available in over 35 states across the US. On average, participants utilizing Double Up Food Bucks reported consuming 1.57 cups of vegetables and .96 cups a fruit a day, which is higher than the US average. Furthermore, participants who shop with Double Up for 6 months or more, reported eating 2.78 cups of vegetables a day.<sup>5</sup>

### SNAP Shopper Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ For those who had used DUFB, there was overwhelming agreement that the program was beneficial.
- ❖ There was increased purchase of fruits and vegetables among those who had utilized the program.
- ❖ Many participants were unaware of the DUFB program.
- ❖ Barriers included shoppers not knowing how the program works - where or how to use DUFB, a lack of vendors who are familiar with the program and who accept DUFB, farmers markets being less accessible and more expensive than regular grocery stores.

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<sup>5</sup> Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Information Center (GusNIP NTAE): Impact Findings



*“We always try to buy fresh fruits and vegetables whenever we can because even though there is a front side investment that is slightly higher, the nutritional value is so much stronger. It [DUFB] really puts us in a position where we are able to get more of those fresh fruits and vegetables and put the nutrients in our bodies instead of losing so much of that to processing along the way. The more fruits and vegetables we eat, we see the difference in our health numbers.” -SNAP shopper*

*“I previously worked as an eligibility worker for DSS [Department of Social Services] and I never knew about it when I issued food benefits to people or else I would have told them about it as well.” -SNAP shopper*

*“Our farmers market, I really appreciate that they do the Double Up Bucks, but based on what week you're there, some of the vendors don't know what is going on with it really. So like some days the vendors are cool taking it and other days they're not, even though their product is eligible.” -Student SNAP shopper*

### **Statewide Partner Main Points of Discussion**


- ❖ As heard in the SNAP shopper sessions, partners shared that many of those they serve had no idea that the DUFB program existed, but those who knew about it loved and appreciated it.
- ❖ One respondent mentioned hearing from ranchers and farmers who did not have their products for sale in stores and thus couldn't sell to people on SNAP - that through the DUFB program at farmers markets, they were now able to make new relationships and connections and also get their products out.
- ❖ As with many SNAP recipients, partners relayed that there is a lack of access to farmers markets and only a small subset of stores that participate in the program.
- ❖ Partners shared that systems are complicated to maneuver for businesses and should be integrated with SNAP/EBT in order to ensure ease of navigation and a sustainable source of funding for the program.
- ❖ The stigma attached to using vouchers or tokens was mentioned, with a recommendation that shoppers need to be able to access DUFB online.

*“One of the things that's been difficult is that there aren't stores and farmer's markets in every single area here in Pueblo. There's just a Sav-A-Lot that accepts the Double Up Food Bucks, so one of the big concerns is transportation. How do people get over there to get the fruits and vegetables that they need and so that's extremely difficult.” -Statewide Partner*

## **Fruit and vegetable purchases are 30% cheaper and sugary drinks are 30% more expensive when using SNAP**

### **Background**

National advocacy organizations as well as government agencies – but not often SNAP shoppers themselves – have for many years been examining and debating the potential health and financial effects of integrating what are referred to as “incentives” and “disincentives” to healthy eating within the SNAP program. Some studies have found that the most significant health outcomes would come from a pairing of an incentive with a disincentive specifically with a 30% discount on produce and 30% cost increase for



sugary drinks (“[Cost-effectiveness of financial incentives and disincentives for improving food purchases and health through the US Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\): A microsimulation study](#)”, October 2018). These listening sessions provided an opportunity to discuss the potential benefits, challenges, and outcomes of this type of change with SNAP shoppers.

### SNAP Shopper Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ This question was not explored in the listening sessions with students, however among the other SNAP shoppers a majority of participants were in favor of this strategy.<sup>6</sup>
- ❖ Some noted that it would incentivize shoppers to make healthier choices.
- ❖ Respondents mentioned that the framing felt more positive - like shoppers were being given a choice.

*"Definitely provides a good incentive to make healthy choices without taking away the option." -SNAP shopper*

### Statewide Partner Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ Participants liked that this approach was framed as an incentive and affirmed the shopper's right to choose what was best for themselves and their families.
- ❖ There was concern about the administrative impact on stores for having to do the 30% calculation.

*"In thinking about, like reflecting on some of the previous questions, and like the complete exclusion of the sugary sweetened beverages, and the conversation that happened around food justice, and wanting to ensure that SNAP continues to provide the flexibility for people to purchase what's right for them and their families; I see a benefit to this as an incentive and maybe a slightly like dissuading people rather than a complete exclusion of a food item." -Statewide Partner*

## Extra SNAP dollars to purchase fruits, vegetables and other healthy items

### Background

As discussed above, historically the average SNAP benefit has been so low that it alone does not enable participants to actually meet the USDA dietary guidelines. Participants were told that lawmakers in some states were considering a policy where every SNAP participant would receive extra SNAP benefits—for instance more Double Up Food Bucks or SNAP dollars for fruits and vegetables, or for other healthy items such as whole wheat breads and milk. They were asked whether they or someone they know who uses SNAP dollars could benefit from a program like this, and if so, what products would be most helpful to have extra benefits for.

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<sup>6</sup> Although this strategy received an overall positive response among two of the three population groups in this study, it was not listed among the top strategies as the data analyzed only included the perspectives of SNAP shoppers and statewide partners. Students were not asked this question.



## SNAP Shopper Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ There was overwhelming agreement that having extra SNAP dollars to purchase fruits, vegetables and other healthy items would benefit SNAP shoppers.
- ❖ In addition to fruits and vegetables, shoppers would use extra dollars to buy things like meat, meat alternatives, milk, eggs, and beans.
- ❖ One concern about the strategy mirrored partner concerns around potential difficulties for shoppers navigating the program and the extra burden on retailers to implement the program.

*"I would like that as well. My children love fruit and my daughter takes fruit as snacks to school and it gets a little pricey for the fruit and cheese packs, so extra would definitely help." -SNAP shopper*

*"I'm certainly in favor of increasing SNAP benefits for participants but specifying that certain categories of food are eligible for different rewards seems to be a little bit of an extra processing at the grocery store. I think that people generally will buy the food that they buy, regardless of how that food is categorized by the systems that they use. So I'm more in favor personally of a unilateral increase instead of a discriminatory." -Student SNAP shopper*

## Statewide Partner Main Points of Discussion


- ❖ There was mixed support for this idea. While people agreed that making fruits and vegetables (including frozen, canned and plant-based milk products) more available is a good idea, they lifted up concerns about the difficulty of navigating and administering the strategy, citing WIC as a cautionary example.
- ❖ Participants also cautioned against any benefit that is overly prescriptive or that would take individual choice or freedoms away.

*"Let's not be overly paternalistic and dictate what people should and should not eat. Let's not overly complicate the administrative burden and selection which will confuse clients. Let's just increase the net threshold. We already know that healthier is more expensive. Just increase the benefit so folks can select the foods that they need. What we see over and over again, like from the healthy incentives pilot, is that health literacy is not the issue among these populations. People know what they should and shouldn't eat. It's more about accessibility." -Statewide Partner*

## Universal tax paid by all shoppers applied to sugar-sweetened beverages

### Background

National (e.g. Mexico, Chile) and U.S. cities including Boulder have used funding from a sugar sweetened beverage (SSB) tax to address the health outcomes from sugary beverages while funding more health equity initiatives. As a universal tax outside of the SNAP program it could fund healthy food incentives for SNAP. While public health advocates point out that the beverage industry's marketing approaches and the diseases caused by sugary drinks are regressive, not the tax itself, one concern is the potential impact of the tax on households with lower income. CHOICES analyses indicate that households will on average spend less on sugary drinks after the tax goes into effect, providing disposable income for other



purchases. ([“Cost Effective Strategies and Health Equity”, CHOICES Project 2021](#)). While there are many still considering or attempting to pass sugary beverage taxes, numerous countries and cities have already passed this policy.

Boulder and other U.S. cities have used funding from a sugar sweetened beverage (SSB) tax to address nutrition security and inequities. These taxes have decreased intake of SSB, which are the leading contributor to too much weight for children, and contribute to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and tooth decay, ([“Cost Effective Strategies and Health Equity”, CHOICES Project 2021](#)), while increasing access to programs, services and systems that address inequities as well as nutritious food. In 2019 Boulder’s health equity fund allocated resources to more than 45 community organizations. In Oakland, proceeds from the SSB tax have funded clean drinking water in Head Starts, Park and Recreation facilities, and schools.

### **SNAP Shopper Main Points of Discussion**

- ❖ Responses to this strategy were mixed, however the majority of respondents either opposed the tax strategy outright or felt neutral about it because it wouldn’t personally impact their shopping habits.
- ❖ People expressed skepticism about an approach that felt regulatory, limited choice, or that felt like a punishment.

*“And how long until we start regulating salt and then kids go hungry when [they] don’t have access to whole foods or live in food deserts? Education is necessary, restrictions are not.” -SNAP shopper*

### **Statewide Partner Main Points of Discussion**

- ❖ Only three of the participants responded to this question, with two of them being fully supportive of the tax. The third respondent was a dietician and noted that the issue wasn’t “black and white”.


## **Extra SNAP dollars/benefits would be available to purchase fruits and vegetables when sugar-sweetened drinks are no longer SNAP eligible**

### **Background**

Similar to the pairing of incentives with disincentives discussed above, simply providing more funds for just produce while disallowing sugary beverages altogether could be another way for SNAP to provide a foundation for healthy eating. This approach could be more straightforward than others, but this process provided an opportunity to discuss with shoppers if they perceive one approach to be stronger than the other.

### **SNAP Shopper Main Points of Discussion**

- ❖ In general, there was support for this idea, with respondents either agreeing that it would



influence positive choices, or indicating that they felt neutral about it because they wouldn't be personally impacted. However, for those who wouldn't be affected, many felt uncomfortable about imposing limitations on the choices others could make for themselves.

- ❖ There was one outlier group with several respondents strongly disagreeing with this approach; they noted that buying soda was a way for them to treat themselves or their families, or that they used 7Up to treat upset stomachs or for other interventions. Some said that they would buy soda anyway with cash.
- ❖ It should be noted that students were not asked this question.<sup>7</sup>

*“For my family, if it means getting more fruits and veggies, we can avoid buying sugary drinks.” -SNAP shopper*

*“I allow a sugary drink every other day for my kids. It gives them a treat and that would cost money out of my pocket.” -SNAP shopper*

### **Statewide Partner Main Points of Discussion**

- ❖ Partners who felt comfortable answering on behalf of SNAP recipients noted that they liked the idea or at least appreciated it in theory, however, several concerns were raised.
- ❖ Concerns centered around the administrative challenges involved with implementing the strategy, worry about the government's role in limiting or dictating shopper's choices and increased stigma.

*“While I understand the health intent...my concern is that this creates 1) further administrative burden for retailers and administrative agencies 2) further limitations in access points 3) further stigmatization of where and what SNAP shoppers are allowed to use these benefits.” -Statewide Partner*

## **Student-specific Findings**

In addition to the strategies that were explored in the previous section by all SNAP shoppers, SNAP shoppers who are currently enrolled in a college or university were asked a series of questions specific to their experience as students. The findings from the two listening sessions conducted with students are presented in this section.

### **Benefit Usage**

#### **Background**

Students were asked where they are currently using their SNAP benefits and whether they use them all in a single month.

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<sup>7</sup> Data analyzed on this question only included the perspectives of two of the three population groups in this study - SNAP shoppers and statewide partners. Students were not asked this question.



## Student Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ Some students used their SNAP benefits at farmers markets and on Amazon
- ❖ Most students used their benefits at “Big Box” stores like King Soopers/Kroger/City Market, Walmart, Costco, and Target.
- ❖ Students reported having to “stretch” their dollars or finding it difficult to get their benefits to last the entire month before the COVID increase.

*“I started using [my SNAP benefits] at King Soopers but then I switched to Walmart. I live closer to Walmart and sometimes the food is cheaper, which helps me kind of stretch the money that I’m given, but I can’t make it through the month.” -Student SNAP shopper*

## Financial Impact of SNAP Benefits

### Background

Students were asked to share if having SNAP benefits had changed their financial picture by making space in their budget for other expenses or affording them more choices.

## Student Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ There was overwhelming agreement that having SNAP benefits positively impacted student budgets
- ❖ Students used the money they would have used for food to pay for rent, gas, school, car repairs, medical bills and other expenses
- ❖ Many students reported that having SNAP reduced the sense of worry and stress they were experiencing trying to navigate tight budgets while in school

*“I went to the dentist over the summer and could afford the cleaning!” - Student SNAP shopper*

## Ability to Use SNAP on Campus

### Background

Students were asked whether they would use their SNAP benefits to purchase from campus stores if it were an available option.

## Student Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ There was unanimous support for this idea
- ❖ The ability to use SNAP on campus would save students time as well as address transportation barriers for those without vehicles

*“I can’t afford a car or gas or car insurance so I don’t have those things and so getting into the store is either I’m walking or finding a ride, which I don’t want to burden other people, and I also don’t want to*

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*walk 2 miles with my groceries. So being able to walk to campus or get something while I'm there would free up so much of my time and mental energy too." -Student SNAP shopper*

## Buying Food on Campus

### Background

Students were asked whether and where they purchased food on campus.

### Student Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ Students shared that they bought food on campus from vending machines, food trucks, cafes, convenience stores, food courts and in the dining halls.

*"If we could go to the dining hall with our SNAP benefits that would be awesome. Like, so awesome!" -Student SNAP shopper*

## SNAP & Stigma

### Background

Students were asked to share their ideas about how to make shopping with SNAP less stigmatizing.

### Student Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ Student responses were mixed on this question and seemed to depend on one's economic background. For some, conversations about and shopping with SNAP was normalized, and considered part of the overall support students should be able to take advantage of while in school - much like financial aid. For others, shopping with SNAP was uncomfortable, and was accompanied by feelings of judgment.
- ❖ Overall, students felt that more public education and awareness about what SNAP is, who uses it and how to apply would help reduce stigmatization and increase enrollment among eligible students.
- ❖ Students indicated a need to have more information and increased wrap-around support while navigating the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) so that students would know if they are eligible for SNAP or other social support programs, and could get help navigating the various application processes.

*"I think if the narrative was shifted from 'Oh you're like begging for help' or like 'You've messed up and now you have to use this'. It needs to change from that to being more like 'I'm taking advantage of my resources and I'm using what is available to me.'; because like people don't think that way about financial aid and people don't think that way about scholarships, so why do they have to feel that way about food?"<sup>8</sup> -Student SNAP shopper*

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<sup>8</sup> This comment was made in response to the following question, but was referenced here because it spoke directly to the question on stigma.





## Additional Thoughts on What Students Should Know About SNAP

### Background

Students were asked to share what they thought other students should know about SNAP.

### Student Main Points of Discussion

- ❖ Student feedback centered on the need for more education and awareness about SNAP both as a way to ensure that eligible students know about and can utilize the program, and as a means toward reducing stigma.
- ❖ Students also spoke about a desire for increased support navigating the application process and the potential for adding applying for SNAP and other benefits to the overall process of applying for financial aid.
- ❖ Some students remarked about the change from “dependent” status to being independent as a contributor to the need for more education and support.

*“There is a broader scope of who qualifies for it [SNAP benefits] than you may assume and I think sometimes people may come in with preconceived notions about who may qualify for them [SNAP benefits] and it is just not the case and it is really available to lots of folks who meet those certain criterias. So I think just reiterating that and understanding that even though you may have come from a household like growing up that didn't need to utilize it, it is still available for you to utilize when you are independent and making your own money and going to school. “ -Student SNAP shopper*

## Facilitators & Barriers to Purchasing Healthy Foods

Conversations with SNAP shoppers and statewide partners lifted up both facilitators and barriers to purchasing healthy foods. These considerations provide insights into potential shifts to SNAP policy.

### Incentive Programs

Incentive programs were highly supported across the board and indicated that they would promote healthier shopping habits. Incentive programs were also linked to feedback about the importance of providing education and then trusting shoppers to make good choices. Ensuring sovereignty over shopper’s purchasing choices was seen as essential from a justice perspective - allowing people to maintain a sense of agency and dignity while using SNAP. Even when respondents weren’t concerned about a disincentive by itself, or when paired with incentives having a direct impact on their personal shopping habits, people were hesitant to support an option that would limit others’ choices. In general, disincentive programs were seen as creating more barriers among shoppers.

### Education

Educational tools on how to prepare healthy meals on a budget and supplemental recipes were also mentioned as strategies that would support SNAP shoppers in making healthier choices. Shoppers mentioned the nutritional tool from WIC that provides both education and recipes that promote healthy choices.



### **Increased Access**

Engaging more retailers who accept SNAP was a critical theme related to fruit and vegetable access. There was a clear distinction between the level of accessibility experienced by shoppers in urban versus rural areas. Increased access to healthy, nutrient-dense foods, especially in rural areas where long distance travel is required to get to larger, more well-stocked stores is a critical lever in SNAP improvements. Including an option that covered the cost of grocery delivery was a theme that surfaced in all stakeholder groups, especially among those living in rural areas, people with disabilities and among students as a way to address transportation barriers.

### **Increased Awareness About SNAP & Incentive Programs**

Respondents noted that a lack of awareness about the SNAP program - who is eligible, how to apply, who accepts SNAP and available incentive programs like Double Up Food Bucks, kept them from being able to take full advantage of the SNAP program. In some cases, even when shoppers knew where to find information, they reported that it wasn't always complete or up to date. Once people are registered, ensuring that shoppers know where they can shop and what they can purchase using their SNAP benefits is especially important in rural areas where limited options and transportation are critical barriers.

When registering for the listening sessions, students were asked *"How can the program make sure all eligible people on your campus sign up for SNAP? Please check all that you support."* They were then given a list of eight options and asked to check all that apply. The option chosen most was "Give out information about SNAP on receipts from stores (both on and off campus) and/or utility and cell phone bills".

SNAP shoppers also indicated that increasing public awareness about what SNAP is and who uses it could be a way to shift negative stereotypes and narratives about SNAP shoppers and ultimately reduce stigma.


### **Expanded/Improved Use of Technology**

Ideas for using/improving technology related to SNAP included supporting online shopping and delivery, providing up to date information about vendors/retailers who accept SNAP benefits, apps that help shoppers track their spending and purchasing habits, and shelf tags with QR codes that point people to health literacy resources and recipes emerged as helpful improvements. Using technology to shift away from tokens or other currencies that single out SNAP shoppers was noted as an important facilitator for reducing stigma.

## **Additional Policy & Practice Suggestions**

The following suggestions are in no particular order and reflect additional thoughts on how participants believe SNAP could be improved, and access to healthy foods could be enhanced. These strategies may warrant further exploration to determine support and feasibility:

- ❖ Increase benefit amounts to keep pace with inflation


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- ❖ Expand where SNAP benefits can be used including more convenience and “dollar” stores and on college campuses
  - ❖ Expand frozen, canned and other non-perishable F&V options in rural areas or where fresh produce isn’t readily available
  - ❖ Less complicated enrollment process
  - ❖ Greater flexibility in income guidelines and eligibility requirements; consider applicants’ financial picture from a more holistic perspective
  - ❖ Increased allowances for people with dietary restrictions or health conditions
  - ❖ Allow other delivery and food prep services like *Hello Fresh*
  - ❖ Make it easier for vendors to participate in SNAP; consider subsidies
  - ❖ Make the Double Up Food Bucks program available in all stores
  - ❖ Make vitamins/supplements, diapers, feminine hygiene and personal hygiene products SNAP eligible
  - ❖ Provide additional discounts to students
  - ❖ On-campus farmers markets where students can take advantage of the Double Up Food Bucks program

## Recommendations

The Colorado Listening Project surfaced several critical considerations for improvements to SNAP and related incentive and disincentive programs. The recommendations presented here align with the strategies explored across all stakeholder groups that received the most positive comments from SNAP shoppers: the ability to purchase hot and prepared foods and the Double Up Food Bucks program, as well as the paired “disincentive” (higher costs for sugary beverages) with an “incentive” (lower costs for produce), even though that strategy was not discussed with students. An additional recommendation was made based on a universal theme that arose across stakeholders pointing to persistent gaps in access and benefit adequacy for SNAP shoppers in Colorado’s rural communities.

In order to further understanding of the most viable approaches, we recommend the following next steps.

1. Explore pilots or initiatives designed to test/implement a hot or prepared foods strategy in order to gain deeper insight into challenges and promising practices. Nourish Colorado and its partners may consider requesting a USDA waiver to pilot such a program in Colorado among SNAP users in a particular region or among priority populations, i.e. the CA EBT restaurant program which allows eligible homeless, disabled, and/or elderly (ages 60 and above) CalFresh benefit recipients to use their CalFresh benefits to purchase hot, prepared food from [participating restaurants](#).
2. Conduct a user and vendor information and education campaign for Double Up Food Bucks. Phase one of this recommendation would involve conducting additional focus groups or surveys to learn more about where various SNAP shopper groups typically go for information, how



shoppers learned about the Double Up Food Bucks program, and how shoppers would prefer to receive information related to SNAP and SNAP-related incentive programs like DUFEB. Based on information learned in the series of listening sessions, we recommend specific outreach to Spanish speakers, higher ed students and rural residents. Additionally, we recommend focus groups with a cross section of vendors across the state to learn about compelling incentives and barriers for farmers and retailers accepting DUFEB. Insights from these campaigns could be used to inform a second phase of action involving the development and implementation of education and marketing campaigns for the Double Up Food Bucks program. Phase three would involve tracking whether these efforts increase participation in the program and shopper and vendor satisfaction.

3. Convene stakeholders in rural regions to learn more about how to increase access through expanded partnerships, collaboration and coordination. This may include local food security advocates, community organizations, schools, direct service providers, retailers, transportation authorities and policy partners. In addition to bolstering communication and information sharing within and between regional stakeholder networks, we believe that developing a shared understanding of the barriers rural Coloradans face when using SNAP and related incentive programs will increase the efficacy of pilot programs and policy recommendations ensuring that it is inclusive of and responsive to the needs of rural Coloradans.
4. Convene student hunger experts, student advocates, policy partners and other stakeholders from colleges and universities to further explore student-specific feedback and possible programmatic and/or policy interventions.

## Next Steps

Immediate next steps include developing a strategy for sharing the findings from this report with participants and other relevant stakeholder groups and prioritizing actions to be taken on the Recommendations and Additional Policy & Practice Suggestions. To that end, Nourish Colorado commits to a dissemination process that includes hosting Zoom-based conversations with participants and other partners/stakeholders who could be instrumental in helping to implement the work. Nourish Colorado will also commit to sharing these findings through digital and social media platforms.

Additionally, Nourish Colorado staff will continue to cross analyze the findings from the online survey with the report findings to identify shared themes and outliers across data sets. Updates to this report will be made based on this second phase of analysis.

## Appendix: Resources from Listening Sessions

### Appendix A: Participant Demographics

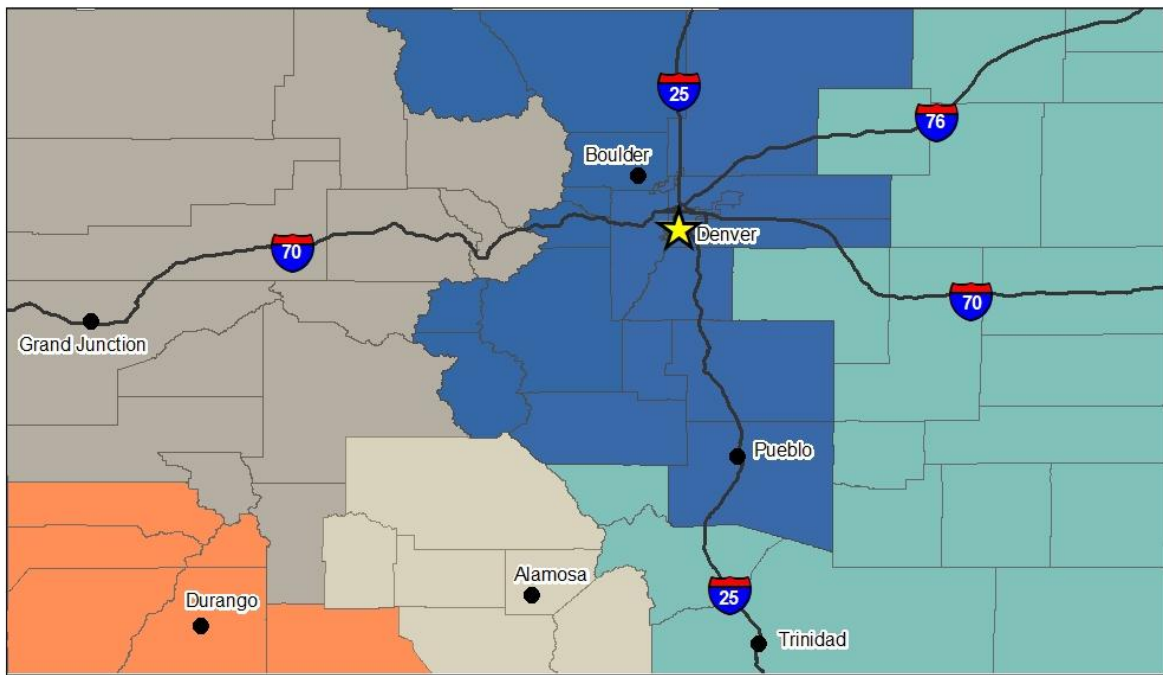
Participant Demographics <sup>9</sup>	
Age	
Under 18	1 (2.50%)
18-24	1 (2.50%)
25-34	14 (35%)
35-44	11 (27.50%)
45-54	9 (22.50%)
55-64	3 (7.50%)
65+	1 (2.50%)
Gender	
Female	47 (90.38%)
Male	5 (9.62%)
Gender non-conforming/non-binary	0 (0)
Prefer not to answer	0 (0)
Race/Ethnicity	
Asian or Pacific Islander	1 (1.92%)
Black or African American	3 (5.77%)
Hispanic or Latino	17 (32.69%)
Native American or Alaskan Native	0 (0.00%)
White or Caucasian	26 (50.00%)
Biracial/Multiracial	4 (7.69%)
A race or ethnicity not listed here	1 (1.92%)
# of people under the age of 18 in household	
0	17 (33%)
1	6 (12%)

<sup>9</sup> College student ages not included; information was not collected in registration process

2	15 (29%)
3	8 (15%)
4 or more	6 (12%)


Appendix B: Colorado Region Map & Descriptions

## Colorado Regions



### Colorado Region Descriptions

The Southwest region comprises San Miguel, San Juan, Dolores, Montezuma, La Plata and Archuleta counties. It is mostly rural and includes the small city of Durango, as well as several mountain towns such as Telluride, Hermosa and Silverton. The Southwest region includes Colorado’s only recognized Tribal nations - the Mountain Ute and the Southern Ute Tribes, while the Navajo Nation lies just across the stateline. Wealth disparity is striking across this region. With the cost of living in mountain towns and cities high, and jobs scarce elsewhere.



The Western Slope region comprises Moffat, Rio Blanco, Routt, Grand, Summit, Eagle, Garfield, Mesa, Delta, Pitkin, Gunnison, and Hinsdale counties. It is primarily rural, although it also includes several small cities such as Grand Junction, Glenwood Springs, Craig and Steamboat Springs, and several mountain/resort towns including Aspen, Crested Butte, and Vail. This region includes some of the most impoverished counties in the state as well as some of its wealthiest, and includes several areas where industries such as coal mines and power plants are closing or are on a limited timeframe - leaving many economies and people vulnerable.

The San Luis Valley is very rural and remote, with only a few small towns and one small city, Alamosa. It includes Colorado's oldest non-Indigenous communities, with families that date back to the era of Spanish land grants in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The region maintains strong cultural ties with northern New Mexico and includes Mineral, Saguache, Rio Grande, Alamosa, Conejos and Costilla counties.

The Front Range region comprises the majority of the Greater Denver Region along with Colorado Springs and Pueblo to the south, Fort Collins to the North, and adjacent mountain counties east of the Divide. It includes the counties of Jackson, Larimer, Weld, Boulder, Broomfield, Gilpin, Clear Creek, Jefferson, Adams, Arapahoe, Denver, Douglas, Teller, El Paso, Park, Lake, Chafee, Fremont and Pueblo. The population in this region is concentrated in the cities and the many suburban towns and developments at the eastern edge of the mountains, in exurban and rural areas, scattered around various mountain towns, and in tourist-oriented communities, such as Estes Park and casino towns such as Cripple Creek and Blackhawk.

The Eastern Plains region comprises approximately one-third of the state's geographic area and although vast in scope, it is the least populated part of the state. It includes the counties of Sterling, Morgan, Elbert, Lincoln, Crowley, Otero, Las Animas, Baca, Bent, Prowers, Kiowa, Cheyenne, Kit Carson, Yuma, Washington, Phillips and Sedwick. This region is very rural and has long struggled economically with some of the highest poverty rates in the State.

## Appendix C: [Listening Session Engagement Tools](#)