SNAP-Ed Statewide Needs Assessment FAQs

3/1/2023 | SNAP-Ed Evaluation Team

Introduction

The February 17, 2023, the Friday Forum focused on findings from the SNAP-Ed Needs Assessment. The SNAP-Ed Evaluation Team collected questions and feedback from forum participants through a Google Jamboard. Team members organized questions and comments into categories following the presentation. Questions and responses are included below, and additional comments from participants can be found on the Jamboard.

General Needs Assessment Questions

1. If the needs assessment is going through 2025, will we still be basing our 3-year plan off of it?
   Yes. The federal requirement for a statewide needs assessment only needs to focus on the SNAP-Ed eligible population; this is the information we have collected and that is available for FFY 2024-2026 planning. The multi-year, phased approach for this needs assessment allows the SNAP-Ed evaluation team to have enough time and capacity to assess assets and needs from not only program eligible people, but also SNAP-Ed program staff and community partners. This will provide us with rich data for future plan updates and our next three-year planning cycle.

2. How can this compliment local level needs assessment work?
   This statewide needs assessment provides insight into facilitators and challenges around healthy eating, physical activity, and nutrition education in Washington State as a whole, and can help guide statewide goals and objectives for the 2024-2026 plan. It will not have the level of detail necessary to learn about specific needs in a local community. That means, this assessment could serve as jumping off point for a local needs assessment or even conversations with partners around their priorities.

Data Sources

3. Did you guys look at the WAFOOD Survey results at all for Food Insecurity across WA State (especially demographics)? Or only that one survey source?
   The data that we shared in our presentation was all from the CDC’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey. This is a national survey done every year with hundreds of thousands of responses, and is a reliable way to track changes in Americans’ health and behavior over time.
In our complete Needs Assessment report, there is also statewide data from DSHS about SNAP users in the state, from the American Community Survey about income and poverty levels, from the Washington state Office of Financial Management (OFM) about state-level demographics, and the just-released WAFOOD Survey #4 with information about food security.

4. **Is the BRFSS data for WA State?**
   Yes, the BRFSS data we shared is specifically the responses from Washington state, compared to the nation as a whole. There were 13,142 responses representing Washington state.

**Interview & Survey Questions**

5. **How do you recruit people for interviews and surveys?**
   Potential interviewees were drawn from a list of SNAP users and Medicaid users in Washington state provided by DSHS and the Health Care Authority (HCA) and then filtered into call lists categorized by priority population. A similar process was used to identify individuals for survey recruitment.

   Priority populations were identified based on demographic data of current SNAP and WIC users, and input from program staff and evaluation staff about special populations that are often overlooked or under-surveyed, particularly those who were of limited English proficiency (LEP). These priority populations were English-speaking young adults aged 16 to 23, English-speaking people living in rural areas (defined by USDA’s 2010 Rural-Urban Commuting Area [RUCA] codes), East African refugees and immigrants (defined as those who had Amharic, Oromo, Somali or Tigrigna as their preferred language), Spanish-speakers, Vietnamese-speakers, Russian-speakers, and Ukrainian-speakers.

6. **Can we distribute survey promotion materials to our communities?**
   During this phase of data collection, we’ve mailed invitations to participate in the survey directly to potential respondents who were identified through a list of SNAP and Medicaid users in Washington State. Each respondent has a unique ID, which will allow us to pull their demographic information from the data we have on SNAP users. This method makes sure that we are able to target surveys directly at the identified priority populations who are eligible for SNAP-Ed programming, but who may or may not have had contact with SNAP-Ed.

   We are looking at other ways to incorporate direct survey promotion in the future, including developing another branch of the survey that includes demographic questions or partnering with LIAs to recruit respondents the next time a participant survey is conducted.
7. **Were there any incentives or compensation offered for participating in the interview or survey?**

   Interviewees were reimbursed for their time and the costs associated with completing a 45-minute interview with a $50 Amazon gift card. The reimbursements for survey respondents will use a tiered approach – the first 100 respondents will be reimbursed for their time and the costs associated with a 20-minute survey with a $10 Amazon gift card; subsequent respondents will receive a SNAP tote bag until supplies run out.

8. **When talking with the 43 participants, was this a one-on-one conversation or focus groups?**

   Interviews were conducted by phone on a one-on-one basis.

9. **Interviews with 16-23 year olds - were they college students?**

   Interviewees were asked about their age, as well as their employment/student status. Nine interviewees said they were full-time students; 5 of those full-time students were in the young adult age range (19 to 23 years), and 4 were between 26 and 32 years old.

   Among the 23 young adult (16 to 23 years) respondents, 9 said they weren’t currently working or going to school, 5 were full-time students, 5 were employed full-time, 4 were going to school part-time, and 2 were working part-time.

10. **How is this [interview] data intended to be used?**

    Are 43 interview participants enough to extrapolate results to reflect the whole state? Especially when no non-English speakers were included?

   Interview data is meant to be viewed alongside population data for broader context, and eventually alongside survey data too, which will help fill in some gaps. The intent is to provide a state-level perspective around barriers and facilitators to healthy eating and physical activity, communication channels for nutrition and physical activity information, and nutrition education interest and feedback. These interviews, as well as the population level data, literature review, and the forthcoming survey data are all meant to help decide on the statewide goals and objectives for the next 3-year plan.

   Although we were aiming for a larger sample, 43 is a large enough sample to establish statistical significance – in this case, it was a large enough sample for us to reach saturation and hear similar themes from respondents.

   Because interview data did not include all priority populations, it will be important to review survey findings when they are available. Provided we have adequate responses from each population group, we are very interested in looking at whether there are differences in responses based on population group.

11. **What if community needs differ from this very small sampling?**
Community perspective is always important, and we strongly advocate engaging with community partners and community members to identify where and how projects should be tailored to fit local community wants and needs. The goal of the state-level needs assessment is to get a big picture view of what’s happening across Washington State and help decide on overall state goals and objectives. We will still need community data to understand local context, which may have more nuance than what we see at the state level.

12. Can you share the interview questions?
Yes – interview questions will be shared in a separate PDF. Please email the evaluation team with any questions or feedback at SNAPedEvaluation@doh.wa.gov, and we’ll keep this in mind for future interviews or surveys.

13. Maybe the lack of direct education participation could be due to a more PSE focus over the past couple of years?
This is one possibility. Another possibility to consider is that adults typically make up a smaller percentage of direct education participants in Washington state (typically 6-10%). Since our interviews took place with adults, there was a smaller chance that they would have participated in direct education.

14. Did the interviews dig into if people were actually interested and ready to participate in nutrition ed (but not able to find one), or didn’t participate and didn’t mind that?
The interview questions did not specifically ask about interest in direct education, but rather focused on respondents’ experience with direct education. This is a gap that will be addressed in the survey questions, which includes the following questions: Would you be interested in participating in a nutrition education class or program in the future?; What topics would you be interested in?; What would make a nutrition class or program appealing to you?

Hopefully this will help us better gauge interest in direct education moving forward.

15. Will the survey questions be asking about food access more broadly than just focusing on healthy eating, which might skew more to direct education approaches?
The goal of both the interview and survey is to identify facilitators and barriers to healthy eating, which may encompass food access. We included the following questions in the interview:
- What makes it hard to eat healthy?
- What helps you eat healthy?
- How do you usually get to the grocery store?
- About how long does it take to get to the store where you usually buy food?
- What are all the ways you can think of that would improve food access for you or someone in your situation?
The survey includes a question that asks respondents to share what might help them or someone like them eat healthy, and included a variety of potential response options based on what we heard through interview responses (knowing which foods to choose, knowing how to cook healthy foods, healthy meal kits, if my kids/family like healthy foods, if it was easier to get to the grocery store, if better grocery options were available where I live, if healthy foods were affordable, if I had more time and energy, and Other). The ‘Other’ category will allow respondents to write-in a response if they don’t see one that matches their experience.

The survey also asks about typical transportation to the grocery store, and about how long it usually takes for respondents to get to the grocery store, and two food insecurity questions.

Direct Education Questions

16. Was there a reason children under 5 weren’t included? Seems relevant, especially as children were cited as a barrier (picky eating) and facilitator (PA).

Our literature review focused specifically on measurable behavior change. With the youngest children, measuring that behavior change is hard and often unreliable, because it requires monitoring and reporting from caregivers.

17. How long do they follow YY (Younger Youth) after Nutrition Education?

There were a few studies that followed up with younger youth or their caregivers after an educational intervention. More frequently, immediate post-testing occurred at the conclusion of direct education. However, those that did included follow up with post-surveys or interviews did so at the 6 month, 12 month, and/or 18 month marks.

18. Kids can’t choose their meals when at home. What type of eaters are they as adults?

Our literature review did not cover this type of longitudinal inquiry, and long-term data that looks at the transition of behavior from childhood to adulthood is not very common.

19. If focus is older youth and a lot of middle and high school students not eligible, how do we focus our program on that age group?

There are many middle schools and high schools across the state that are eligible for SNAP-Ed (≥50% of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch). You can find all the eligible schools in Washington for all school types on our new Community and School Eligibility Dashboard (School SNAP-Ed Eligibility tab), at https://wasnap-ed.org/evaluation/data-and-reports/. If you have questions about how to use the dashboard, please reach out to use at SNAPEdEvaluation@doh.wa.gov.
20. Did you find research on the scale/impact of nutrition ed compared to other categories of intervention (food benefit changes, universal basic income, changes in built environment, etc.)?

While our two research questions did not involve the type of scaled comparison described, the literature does show positive results with changes to environments. Across all age groups, multilevel efforts combining education with policy, system, and environmental interventions was most frequently linked to positive behavior changes, especially when changes were made to create environments that promote healthy eating and food choice.

21. Do you think there was a lack of participants who had attended direct ed because of COVID? Maybe the lack of direct education participation could be due to a more PSE focus over the past couple of years?

How is 7% saying that they participated in nutrition ed compared to the number of people served by current SNAP-Ed nutrition ed?

The interviews were with adults, who historically have not made up a large portion of the SNAP-Ed Direct Education audience. While overall participation in SNAP-Ed Direct Education fell due to COVID, adults actually made up a larger proportion than normal in 2021 with the addition of online learning opportunities, and less in-school DE. For context, 1,487 adults (8% of all participants) participated in direct education in 2019, 715 (6%) in 2020, 334 (19%) in 2021, and 270 (8%) in 2022.

As for the focus of PSE, this is one possibility. However, another possibility to consider is that a smaller percentage of SNAP-Ed direct education in Washington State takes place with adults. Since our interviews took place with adults, there was a smaller chance that they would have participated in direct education.

PSE Questions

22. Recently, emphasis has been placed on PSE. Is there going to be larger emphasis on DE now?

Results from the literature review component of the needs assessment and historical trends in our own WA SNAP-Ed data demonstrate that projects that incorporate PSE are usually more effective than direct education alone.

23. Will the needs assessment have any investigation of the quality of people's neighborhoods, environments, local/regional policies, etc.? Where are the PSE questions?

No, the needs assessment was designed to look at statewide trends around healthy eating and physical activity, and help create the state goals and objectives for the next 3-year plan. Looking into local neighborhoods, environments, and policies are great places to start for local level needs assessments, especially when getting ready to start on new projects or plans. Reach out to the evaluation team if you need support in developing a plan or identifying tools for your local level needs assessment.
The interview and survey components of the statewide needs assessment asked about facilitators and barriers to healthy eating and physical activity. The information from those questions can be used to guide and tailor a PSE component of a project.