

# Hunger Policy Playbook for Washington

*2021-23*



**AntiHUNGER  
& Nutrition  
COALITION**

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## ADDRESSING HUNGER FOR AN EQUITABLE RECOVERY

Welcome to the 2021 Legislative Session! It goes without saying that this will be a challenging year. You will be faced with important decisions about protecting people's health and economic security; rebuilding the state's economy and ensuring sustainable and equitable investments are made for the health and safety for all of Washington's communities.

Chief among your concerns should be ensuring consistent, equitable access to nutritious food, as it is essential to promoting good health, well-being, and stability in people's lives. It is essential for children to focus on learning, for adults to find and keep good paying jobs, and for seniors to be active and independent. In other words, Washington's long-term recovery depends on what we do today to ensure that people have enough food to eat. Yet right now, far too many Washingtonians don't have enough to eat.

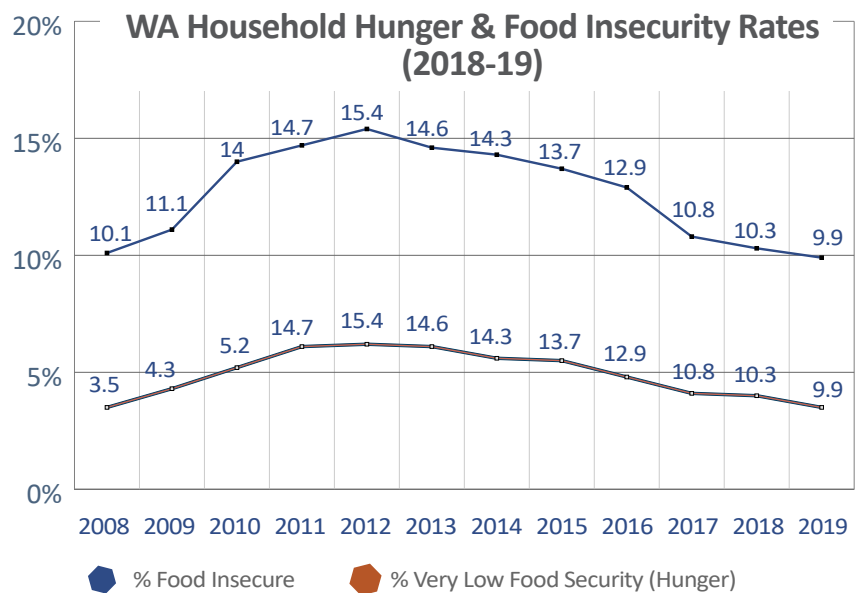
According to USDA, hunger and food insecurity rates across Washington spiked during the Great Recession and did not return to pre-recession levels until just before COVID-19 struck. In 2019, nearly 1 in 10 of all Washington households were food insecure.

Since the pandemic began, [University of Washington researchers](#)<sup>1</sup> show that **now 30% of households** surveyed are food insecure. Almost 60% of those food insecure households include children; 33% of households receive some kind of food assistance; and, people of color are 1.5 times more likely to be food insecure as white people – similar racial disparities found by DOH more a decade ago. **In our state, hunger and poverty and racial inequality have been joined for years, and COVID has only made these problems more stark and more urgent.**

So we offer you this **Hunger Policy Playbook** as a resource to provide you the tools and information you need to champion budget investments and policies necessary to fight hunger and build a stronger food system - one that supports our struggling families, struggling family farms, struggling local communities, and is also equipped to respond to an ongoing pandemic and prepare for the future.

In this Playbook, you'll find facts about hunger in Washington; overviews of the state's nutrition assistance programs and the network of nonprofit agencies engaged in hunger relief; and opportunities to strengthen these systems to reach more people more efficiently. We also suggest activities to learn about hunger in your district and include a contact list for members of our Coalition's steering committee—your go-to contacts for information and connection to programs and services in your district.

Washington learned a critical lesson during the Great Recession that is relevant for today's economic and health crises: Washington must prioritize the basic needs of those with the least in order to pave the way for an equitable recovery for all Washingtonians. We look forward to working with you in securing food access, a keystone to building a healthier, more equitable Washington.



<sup>1</sup>[https://nutr.uw.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WAFOOD\\_intro\\_brief\\_20201022.pdf](https://nutr.uw.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WAFOOD_intro_brief_20201022.pdf)

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## 2021 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

### Anti-Hunger Priorities:

#### Support Food Banks (\$23.1 million)

Expand funding for **Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP)**, which is our state's core support for local food banks who have had record increases (30% - 300%) in demand for services. Through WSDA, EFAP provides flexible funds for local food bank coalitions to address local community needs – from food purchasing to distribution to storage.

Continue WSDA's **Farm to Food Pantry Grants**, which enable food pantries to buy directly from local producers to feed hungry people, largely in rural communities. Funds can be targeted to prioritize farmers of color, who are less likely to have access to COVID relief for agriculture, and tribal food programs, who have been hard hit economic disruptions.

Create **COVID Response Food Bank Grants** through WSDA to provide flexible, responsive funds for food banks to respond to emerging opportunities and targeted community needs, especially in communities of color and tribal communities, to address ongoing hardship and supply chain issues over the biennium. In 2020, similar funds supported projects such as: connecting food banks with an airline meal company to provide meals for home delivery; or, connecting a school district kitchen, a food bank, and local growers to purchase food to make and freeze scratch-cooked meals for delivery.

#### Strengthen SNAP

Continue DOH's **SNAP Fruit and Vegetable Incentive Program** which matches funds by SNAP shoppers to purchase produce. This responds to the steep increase in SNAP clients, as well as preserves the Fruit & Veg Prescription Program for low income patients at community health clinics, which is not covered by Washington's federal grant. **(\$3 million)**

Expand **Transitional Food Assistance** to include households with children who receive food stamp benefits and provide a small one-time cash benefit and 5 months of additional food assistance to avoid the 'benefit cliff' for those who would lose benefits because they exceed the income level or would otherwise lose their food benefits. **(\$989,000)**

Ensure our state's **Food Assistance Program** for legally residing immigrants is funded adequately to meet its requirement to mirror the federal food stamp program by increasing benefit levels for certain months in 2021. **(\$6.7 million)**

#### Improve Meals for Kids (\$4.4 million)

Create **Farm to School to Families grants** through OSPI and WSDA to enable school nutrition programs to buy from local farmers to improve the nutritional quality and appeal of school meals, and to distribute meals to families in more accessible, family-friendly ways.

### Anti-Poverty Priorities:

Expand funding at SBCTC for **Basic Food Education & Training program** to place navigators at each of our state's community and technical colleges to connect low income students with SNAP (Basic Food) and to support services to meet education and basic needs (tuition, fees, books/tools, housing, child care, transportation, etc.) – see 2019's HB [1893](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1893&Year=2019&Initiative=false)<sup>1</sup>. Navigators ensure students are able to complete their job training and education successfully, and BFET investments draw down federal match funds dedicated to direct support services for students. **(\$88,000 per CTC = \$6 million/biennium; federal reimbursement of \$2.992 million/biennium)**

<sup>1</sup> <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1893&Year=2019&Initiative=false>

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**Strengthen TANF** by permanently extending COVID policies that allow more families to become - and stay - eligible for TANF by rolling back rigid sanction policies, and restoring time limit extensions for families that are complying with program requirements but still facing hardship.

**Invest in housing and homelessness services** with \$250 million for permanent affordable housing through the Housing Trust Fund and increase document recording fees to fund ongoing homelessness prevention and wrap-around services.

**Prevent homelessness by protecting tenants:** Provide rent assistance and adapt eviction policies to prevent evictions due to COVID-related non-payment of rent or without just cause.

**Modernize the 'standard of need' for cash assistance programs** to more accurately define poverty and set cash assistance support levels. The new standard is based on studies of actual living costs and accounts for inflation; includes costs of shelter, fuel, food, transportation, clothing, household and personal maintenance, and necessary incidentals. *(DSHS request legislation)*

## **Our Ongoing Commitments:**

### **Sustainable Revenue for a Healthy, Hunger-free Washington**

Create a more **fair and balanced state tax system** by closing outdated tax loopholes, increasing transparency in tax breaks, and finding new and sustainable sources of revenue to ensure services are available to help people out of poverty and to invest in the foundations of a healthy, prosperous and hunger-free Washington.

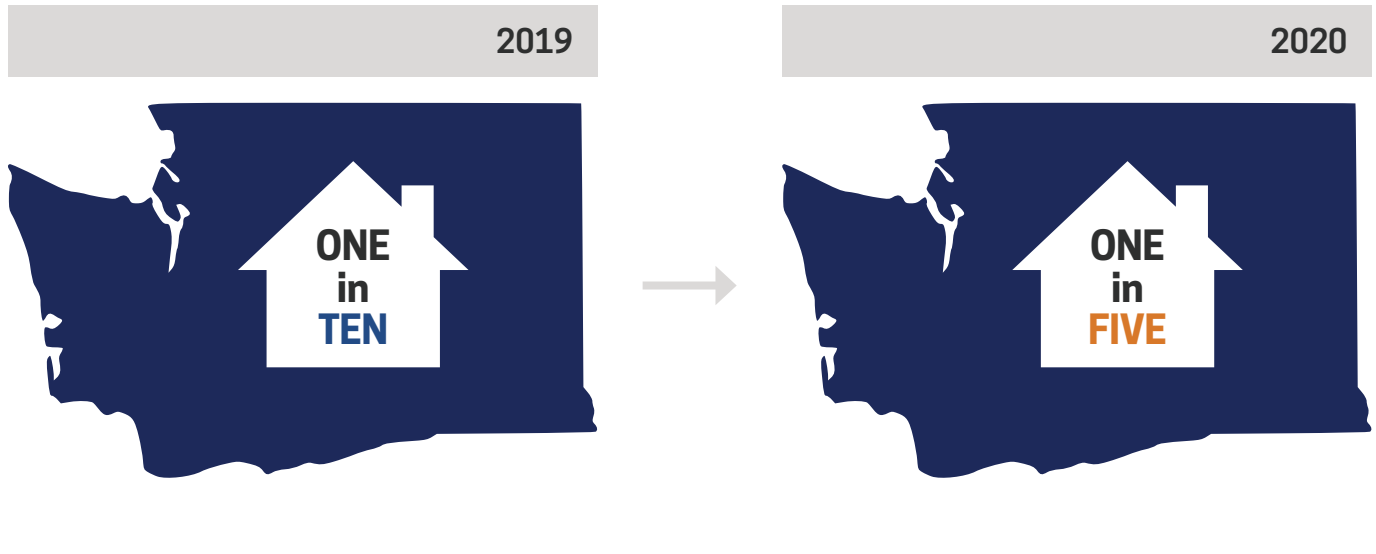
### **Protect Investments in Nutrition, Health & Economic Stability for People in Need**

Our state has created innovative programs and proactive policies that help fight hunger and poverty in our communities. Our Coalition is committed to **protect and strengthen basic needs, anti-hunger, and anti-poverty programs for low-income people** so these programs continue to fight hunger and build stable pathways out of poverty.

# Washington Poverty and Hunger: By the Numbers

## Food insecurity:

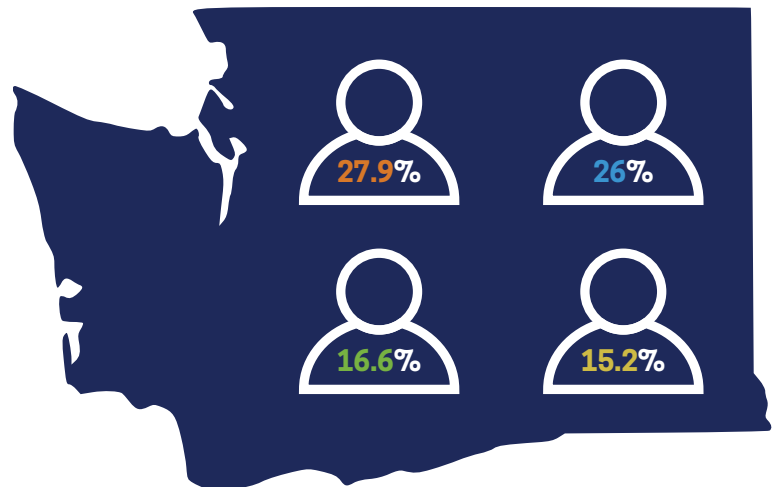
- Pre-pandemic: USDA Household Food Insecurity for 2019: 1 in 10 Washington households
- During pandemic: Northwestern University, US Census Pulse Data, July 21, 2020: 1 in 5 Washington households



- During pandemic, by Race/Ethnicity of Respondent (Northwestern University, US Census Pulse Data, July 21, 2020):

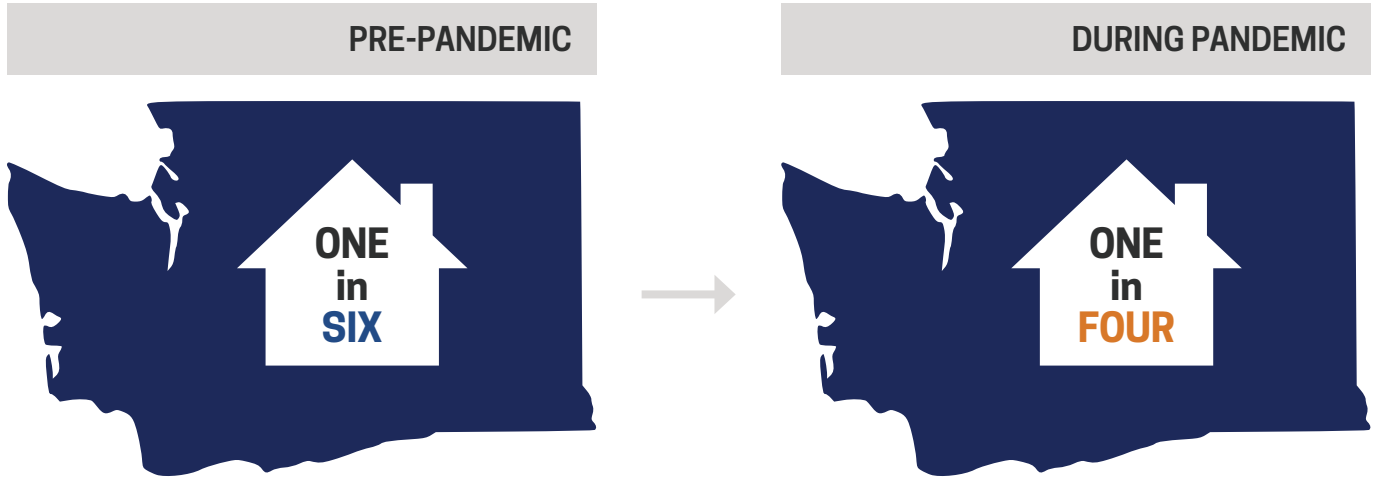
- Black: 27.9%
- Hispanic or Latinx: 26%
- Asian/Pacific Islander: 16.6%
- White: 15.2%

▫ **Note:** Federal Census Pulse Data do not include Native American households - for context, Washington's BRFSS data from several years ago showed that American Indian/Alaska Native adults were 2.5 times more likely to be food insecure than white adults; they were the second-most food insecure racial/ethnic population in our state after Hispanic/Latinx adults.



**Child food insecurity:**

- Pre-pandemic - Kids Count Washington: 1 in 6 Washington children lived in a food insecure household
- During pandemic - Northwestern University, US Census Pulse Data (July 21, 2020): 1 in 4 Washington households with children



**Poverty:**

- Federal poverty level, family of 4 (2019): \$25,750 per year
- Washington children living in poverty (2019): 1 in 8

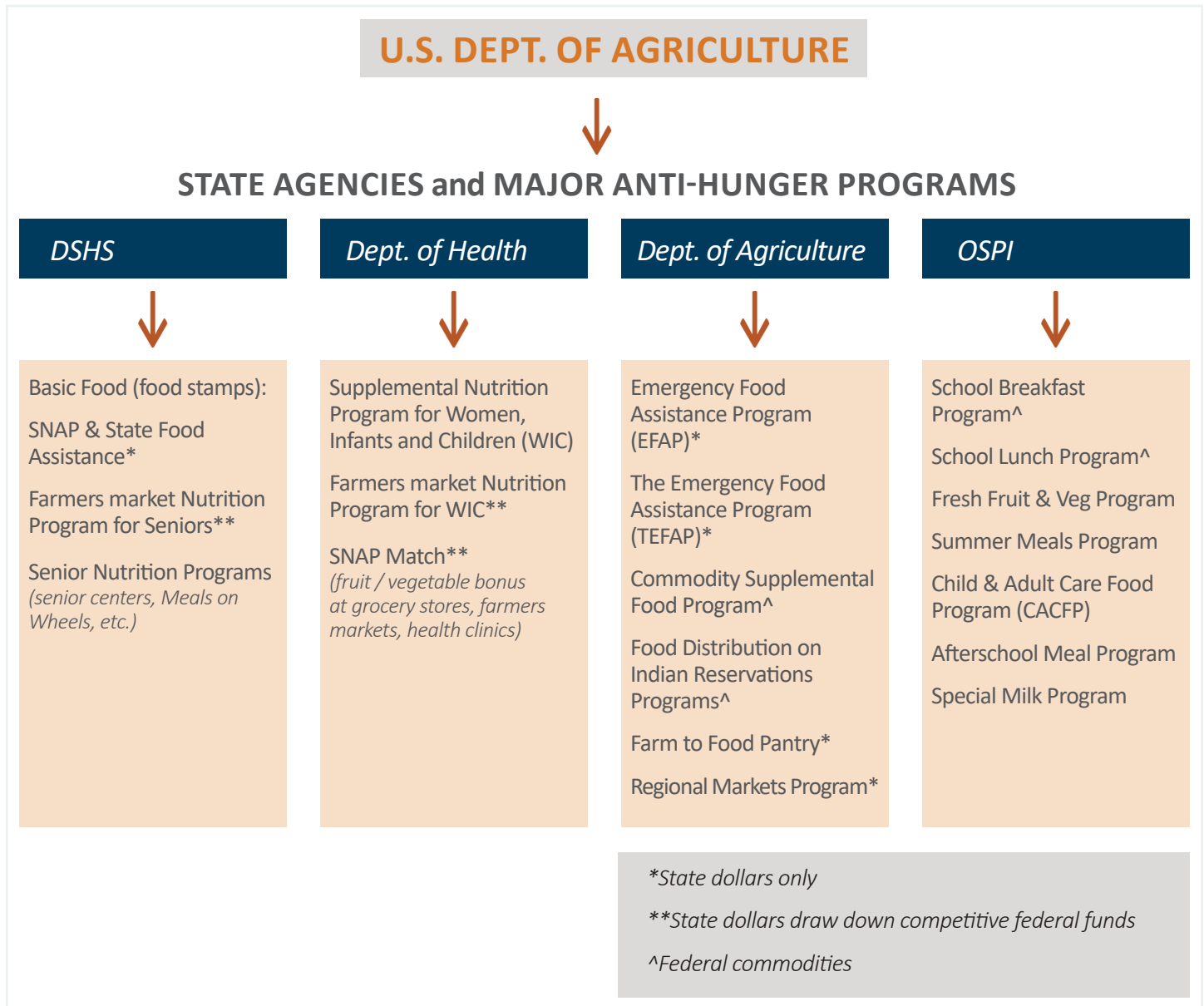


- Total Washington population living in poverty (2019): 1 in 10



# State and Federal Hunger Safety Net in Our State

## Roadmap of Washington's Food Assistance Programs





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## Nutrition Assistance Programs: How They Work and COVID Changes

In this section, you'll find descriptions of the essential programs and services that make up our hunger safety net, with statistics about access and participation, as well as information about COVID-19 changes to these programs, and opportunities to strengthen these programs to ensure more equitable food access during the long-term recovery.

### How Basic Food (SNAP, or food stamps) Works in Washington

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps) is called Basic Food in Washington; it provides food benefits to people with low-incomes to buy groceries with an EBT card from certified retailers (grocery stores, farmers markets/stands, convenience stores, etc.).

#### **Basic Food Eligibility:**

- Must be a U.S. citizen or a legally residing immigrant; and
- Must have a household gross income (before deductions) of no more than 200% FPL: (federal poverty level is \$43,440/year for a family of 3); and
- Must have net income at or below 100% FPL (\$21,720/year for a family of 3) after deducting eligible expenses for essential needs: housing, utilities, childcare, and some medical expenses.

Once eligible, total monthly Basic Food benefits depend on household size and net income.

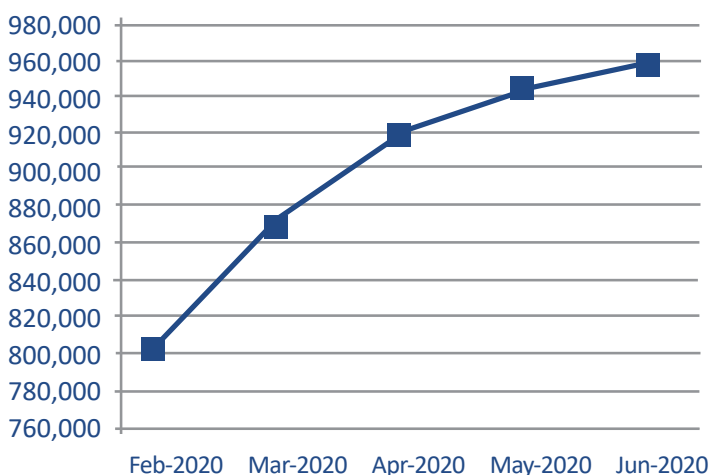
Our state funded food stamp look-alike program, Food Assistance Program (FAP), was created in 1996 in response to federal welfare reform which excluded previously eligible categories of immigrants; FAP was the first of its kind and served as a model for states to create similar programs. For certain low income immigrants (green card holders living in U.S. for less than 5 years; those with special statuses, including victims of human trafficking; and, those from countries which U.S. holds compacts of free association, e.g. the Marshall Islands), Washington State is required by law to provide food benefits that mirror the federal program, using federal SNAP systems. Nearly two-thirds of total FAP recipients (6,774 in Oct. 2020) live in households with family members who qualify for federal benefits.

#### **Key Basic Food/SNAP Statistics in 2019<sup>1</sup>**

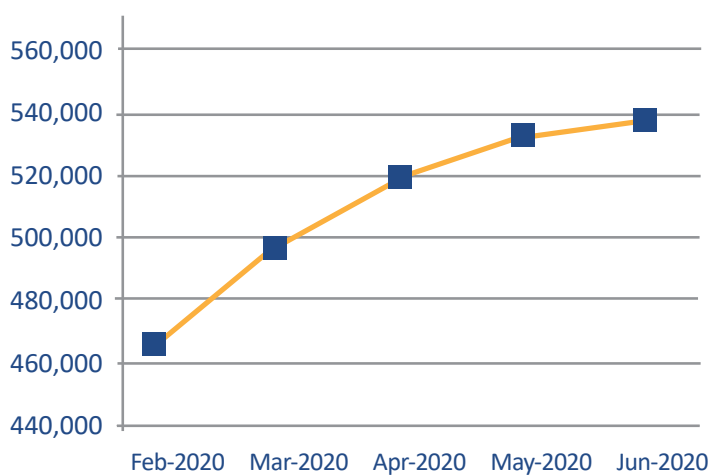
- Average monthly benefit: \$119 per household member, or \$1.32 per person per meal
- Basic Food recipients received \$1.19 billion in benefits
- 1 in 9 Washington residents received Basic Food
- 56% of recipients are in families with children
- Basic Food helped 1 in 9 Washington workers put food on the table
- 39% are in families with members that are elderly or have disabilities
- 37% are in families with jobs
- People who qualify for the minimum SNAP benefit (mostly seniors and people with disabilities) receive only \$16 per month
- In a weak economy, \$1 in SNAP benefits generates \$1.70 in economic activity
- 4,800 certified SNAP retailers statewide
- Washington Basic Food caseload increased 11% between October 2019 and October 2020

<sup>1</sup>Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-state-by-state-data-fact-sheets-and-resources>

**Basic Food Caseload: # of Clients**



**Basic Food Caseload: # of Households**



See [DSHS's ESA Basic Food Briefing Book](#) for SNAP participation by Washington counties<sup>1</sup>.

### ***Basic Food/SNAP and Work***

Federal welfare reform imposed 'work for food' requirements for certain working-age adults (ages 18-49) who are not disabled and do not live with children (ABAWDs, or Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents). ABAWDs must report an average of 20 hours per week of work, or be in a certified employment and training program. People who cannot document this are limited to just 3 months of SNAP benefits within a 3 year period.

USDA does allow states to waive this work requirement in local areas with higher unemployment rates. In 2019, only King County did not qualify for a waiver. Because of COVID, just as during the Great Recession, USDA issued a nationwide blanket waiver for this work requirement, so adults who had been cut off food stamps in King Co. are now eligible to apply again.

Federal law requires that post-secondary students must be enrolled at least half time and work an average of 20 hours per week in order to receive SNAP. As a result of [H.B. 1893](#) passed in 2019, USDA has approved Washington's plan that enrollment in any CTC program counts as the work requirement for post-secondary students, so any eligible low income CTC student may now receive SNAP.

### ***Basic Food Employment & Training (BFET)***

Federal SNAP law provide opportunities for education and job training for SNAP recipients, and Washington is home to the gold standard in SNAP employment and training programs: BFET is a public/private partnership between DSHS, our community and technical colleges (CTCs), and community-based organizations to ensure low income people can get support and training that lead to living wage jobs that will lift them out of poverty. Participants receive case management support from DSHS to enroll in CTC and nonprofit programs in their communities, while receiving services as needed (course supplies and materials, child care, transportation, emergency rent, etc.) to help them meet their basic needs and complete their programs. BFET is funded with an investment of state funds that draw down federal match.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/manuals/briefing-book>

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### ***SNAP Fruit & Vegetable Incentive Program***

Begun with private and local funding, then expanded statewide in 2016 with a federal USDA grant, the **Fruit and Vegetable Incentive Program** (FVIP, managed by DOH) fights hunger and improves health by helping SNAP households buy more fruits and vegetables. With state funding in 2019-21 budget and a second USDA grant, FVIP provides matching dollars at participating farmers markets and grocery stores when shoppers use SNAP to buy produce; FVIP funds can only be spent to buy more fruits and vegetables. Additionally, the Fresh Bucks Prescription (Rx) program allows providers at 68 community health clinics statewide to “prescribe” vouchers for low income patients with food insecurity and/or diet-related diseases to buy fruits and vegetables at the same participating retailers. The Rx program is no longer funded by USDA; it relies on state funding.

### ***SNAP Changes During COVID-19***

Emergency SNAP allotments were authorized by the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act to provide all SNAP households the maximum SNAP benefit for their household size. Unfortunately, 40% of all SNAP households were poor enough to already qualify for the maximum benefit level - these households have had no additional relief since the pandemic began.

Along with most states, DSHS applied for and received certain SNAP application processing waivers, reporting waivers, and others that helped simplify or postpone certain federal requirements, though most of these waiver options for states have now expired. Washington did request critical waivers other states needed, because in the Great Recession DSHS streamlined the SNAP application process with the goal of same-day service and expansive access, making our state’s system a model for others - and better equipped to respond to the unprecedented caseload increase in Spring 2020 and beyond.

### ***Opportunities to Strengthen SNAP’s Impact in 2021-23 Budget:***

- Provide sustained funding to extend SNAP Match/Rx programs to more participants in response to both the increased SNAP caseload, and to mitigate COVID-19’s sharp rise in food insecurity with more healthy food. SNAP Match/Rx also helps support Washington farmers, maintains jobs in local food systems, and fuels our state’s rural economies.
- Fund Basic Food Education & Training (BFET) campus navigators at all community and technical colleges to help income-eligible students enroll in SNAP and get connected with BFET’s education and basic need supports that help students complete their programs successfully and gain living wage jobs.

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## Washington's Emergency Food System (Food Banks, Pantries, and Meal Programs)

### *Overview*

Three organizational levels make up Washington's interconnected emergency food system, the network of food banks, food pantries, and meal programs that provide food items, prepared meals, and other essentials to hungry people. These levels perform different roles and interact in various ways to allow for food sourcing, resource sharing, and technical assistance.

**Food distribution centers** receive and transport the largest quantities of donated food and government commodities through distribution networks set up by the state's large food banks:

- [Food Lifeline](#): serves 353 agencies in Western Washington
- [Northwest Harvest](#): serves 375 agencies statewide
- [Second Harvest](#): serves 280 agencies in Eastern Washington and North Idaho
- [Feeding Washington](#): serves Food Lifeline, Second Harvest, and Feeding America food bank networks across the country

**Regional sub-distributors** are a network of 14 hubs that link the large distribution centers and local providers. They provide large warehouse space, cold storage, and transportation of food to small agencies and programs in settings that range from urban neighborhoods to remote rural areas.

**Local food banks, food pantries and meal programs** distribute food directly to people in need in their communities: statewide there are 530 food pantries, meal programs, and shelters that feed hungry people. Typically, about 40% of the food at a local program comes from the food bank distribution network. In most cases, programs receive food from multiple distribution channels.

**Systems influences** impact the overall capacity of the state's hunger relief system. In addition to considering the individual capacity and resource needs of agencies that comprise the hunger relief system, systems-level dynamics can increase food throughput volume as food moves into the system and from one level to the next. System bottlenecks, inefficiency, and food loss can be ameliorated with improvements that focus on optimizing technology, transportation, and storage capacities in key parts of the system.

### ***Funding: A Private-Public Partnership***

The emergency food system is often thought of as charity, funded with the contributions of individual, family foundations, and corporate giving. In reality, the work of providing food and meals is made possible through a mix of public resources in addition to grants, donations, food drives, and volunteers from the private sector. The federal and state resources include the following:

- Federal commodities provided by The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), and special programs like the Trade Mitigation Program (TMP). These are food items, ordered by WSDA from a list of available commodities that are then purchased by USDA from growers. The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) provides commodities for distribution at tribal food banks.
- In Washington, our state's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) from the general fund, is distributed by WSDA, and is used to purchase food, equipment, and pay lead contractors administrative costs to support the

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work of regional subdistributors and local hunger relief agencies. Funding is apportioned based on local poverty rates and other factors and spending is determined by local control of the lead contractors and their subcontractors.

### ***Key Statistics for Emergency Food***

- WSDA reported 1 in 6 Washingtonians used their local food bank pre-pandemic.<sup>1</sup> They now estimate that number has doubled.
- During the pandemic, food bank use has increased dramatically, from 30% to 300% in various parts of our state.

### ***Changes During COVID***

The pandemic has challenged the emergency food system to meet dramatic increases in need while navigating dips in donated food supply, increased costs for food purchasing and supplies, and an inconsistent volunteer labor force to help get food packed and distributed to people in need.

For the health and safety of food bank recipients and staff, service models focus on minimizing in-person contact. Programs depend on volunteer and staff to pre-pack food items into bags or boxes instead of letting a recipient come in to pick and pack their own food from the options available to them. Food is then distributed using curbside, drivethru, walk-up, and where possible, home delivery.

Meal programs follow the health guidelines for restaurants and have switched to takeout or delivery models.

With the support of federal funding, philanthropy, and WSDA's building networks between growers and emergency food providers, farm fresh food items that were initially going to waste due to the closures of restaurants and event venues have found their way to the emergency food system to give to people in need. Although this has helped stretch limited resources, the volume of food items including dairy products, fluid milk, meat, and fresh produce has exacerbated cold storage capacity problems throughout the system. Last year's one-time appropriation for refrigeration equipment rebates and capacity improvement projects has helped provide some relief but demand continues to outstrip resources.

### ***Opportunities to Strengthen the Emergency Food System***

- Increase EFAP appropriation to ensure food sourcing, distribution, storage, and handling operations are capable to meet the level of need.
- Provide a sustaining investment in our state's Farm to Food Pantry initiative that helps food pantries purchase directly from local growers.
- Enhance the ability of the emergency food system to be flexible and responsive to targeted gaps by piloting and scaling up new initiatives that help secure culturally appropriate foods and navigating food supply chain disruptions.

<sup>1</sup> WSDA Food Assistance Programs

## Child Nutrition: School Meals

Before the pandemic, almost half of all Washington school children (just over 560,000) were enrolled in subsidized school meals - the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Washington requires all schools to provide SBP and NSLP if at least 20% of students are eligible for subsidized meals (with approved exceptions for hardship claims). USDA reimburses schools (via OSPI) for meals served through the federal meal programs. To qualify for reimbursement, meals must meet federal nutrition standards and include specific components (e.g. whole grains, fruits and veg, protein, and milk). Students may also purchase “a la carte” food, which is full price and not reimbursable.

Beginning in 2015, the legislature has funded Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools grants to improve school meal quality, increase scratch cooking in cafeterias, and create healthier school environments. Washington’s Dept of Agriculture houses the Farm to School program, in collaboration with OSPI, which brings together school nutrition programs and local producers to improve meal quality and appeal and increase the amount of Washington-grown products in school meals. Unlike many other states, Washington provides no additional funds to support local food purchases;

2019-20 USDA Reimbursements	School Breakfast	School Lunch
Free	\$1.84	\$3.58
Reduced Price	\$1.54	\$3.18
Paid	\$0.31	\$0.40

currently WSDA’s staff provide technical assistance, training, and partnership opportunities with farmers for schools with their own resources to re-design their meal programs.

Washington consistently ranks among the bottom states for school breakfast participation by low-income children; in 2018-19 (most recent data available), [Washington ranked in the bottom 10 states in the country](#). The legislature has provided both incentives and a mandate to schools to increase participation:

- Washington provides a very small additional reimbursement for all school breakfasts served;
- Children that qualify for reduced price meals do not have to pay for breakfast (the state pays the co-pay, which also is true for reduced price lunch for kids in grades K-3);
- Meals for Kids grants to schools can pay for kitchen equipment, outreach, and other non-food expenses that would increase breakfast participation; and,
- In 2018, HB [1508](#) requires all schools to serve breakfast as part of the school day (Breakfast After the Bell) if they have 70% or more kids qualified for free/reduced price meals.

### **Eligibility for Subsidized School Meals (2019-20):**

- Free school meals - family income at or below 130% FPL: \$27,729 for a family of 3
- Reduced-price meals - family income at or below 185% FPL: \$39,461 for family of 3

If a family receives Basic Food (food stamps), a child is automatically enrolled in free school meals, and in Washington, a federal pilot allows certain children enrolled in Medicaid to also automatically be enrolled in free school meals - this is called “direct certification”.

Certain high need, high poverty schools - where at least 40% of students are directly certified, or identified as

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homeless, migrant or foster children - are able to use a federal provision called Community Eligibility to serve free meals to all students. In 2020, [HB 2660](#) required all schools with 62.5% direct certified/identified students to use the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). In SY 2020-21, over 160,000 children now attend a CEP school - 398 schools in 102 school districts - and are eligible for free meals for the duration of the school's 4 year CEP certification period.

In 2019, [HB 2610](#) banned the practice known as "lunch shaming" - identifying or directly engaging students with unpaid school meal debt - and ensures that any child can receive a federally reimbursable meal at meal times, regardless of ability to pay. The legislation includes provisions to respond to parental authority, help families enroll in subsidized meals if possible, and other measures to limit expenses for schools while also ensuring access to nutrition for children.

### ***Changes During COVID***

Because of COVID, USDA allowed all schools to offer the Summer Meals Program, which provides free meals to all children (age 0 through 18) when schools are closed - but typically only in areas where 50% or more kids qualify for free/reduced price meals. USDA has waived this "area eligibility" requirement through the 2020-21 school year for schools and community-based organizations that typically operate Summer Meals programs in the summertime.

USDA extended waivers for 2020-21 to allow schools and providers to offer multiple meals at once; meals must be (rather than the usual, may not be) consumed off-site; and allow adults to pick up meals without a child present. Schools must have a plan to ensure that students who attend school in person and receiving National School Breakfast and School Lunch are not also receiving free Summer Meals on those same days.

Summer Meals provide a higher reimbursement than typical school meals and have simplified nutrition requirements. Combined, these waivers have significantly eased social distancing concerns for staff and students, eased program administration and student tracking difficulties in chaotic times, and enabled schools to simply feed all kids for free.

Yet, meal participation dropped by 40-50% in Spring 2020, and has dropped even further since the school year began, creating significant budget deficits for school districts. Many districts laid off nutrition staff in the fall, so there are fewer staff to reach kids and families in need. In most districts, only some schools serve as meal distribution points, so access for families may be difficult. Additionally, meals are often served during the school day, when kids doing remote learning are in class at home and parents are working or can't leave their children alone to pick up meals. Serving a week's worth of breakfasts and lunches is efficient for district staff, but creates logistics/transportation problems for many kids and families (e.g. kids in Yakima typically walk to get meals but are in need if wagons or some kind of carrier to bring home 10 meals each). Effective strategies like using buses to deliver meals have been used less frequently in 2020-21 compared to spring, because of staff layoffs and budget cuts.

School nutrition programs are facing both a budget crisis and a staffing crisis, while families with children are dealing with unprecedented food insecurity.

### ***Opportunities to Strengthen School Meals in 2021-23:***

- Fund Farm to Schools to Families Grants that would enable schools to purchase locally grown food from our farmers for meals for low income children and ensure access to those meals is family-friendly and responsive to current conditions.
- Ensure OSPI, school districts, and schools are maximizing all available federal flexibilities and waivers that are designed to feed more children.
- Extend and create flexibilities, such as those provided by the governor in fall 2020 with pupil transportation funds, to allow schools maximum flexibility with funding and policies to reach more children with school meals.

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- Create a post-pandemic plan that builds on legislative progress in the past few years to reach the goal of universal free meals for K-12 students, as is the case during this public health emergency: begin by eliminating the co-pay for school lunch, and extending the mandates for Breakfast After the Bell and Community Eligibility to cover more schools and more students.

## Child Nutrition: Summer Meals

When schools are closed, the Summer Meals Program provides free meals to all children (age 0 through 18) in areas where 50% or more kids qualify for free/reduced price school meals. Administered by OSPI, Summer Meals programs can be sponsored by schools, community-based organizations, and public entities (e.g. cities, parks departments, libraries, etc.). Sponsors may operate one site or 25 sites; sponsors may provide the meals, or they may contract with a food vendor (e.g. it isn't uncommon for a district to provide the meals for sites sponsored by other organizations, as well as for their own school sites). Summer Meals programs may serve a breakfast, lunch and/or snack; they can operate 7 days per week; and, they can operate for as long or as short a period as they choose while schools are closed.

Unfortunately, Washington consistently ranks near the bottom 15 states in the country in reaching low income children who receive subsidized school meals; in 2019, though [Washington increased participation by 2.4% from the previous summer, we ranked 35th](#) in the U.S. and The legislature funds *Summer Meals for Kids* grants so Summer Meals sponsors can pay for kitchen equipment, outreach, and other non-food expenses that would increase participation.

### **Key Statistics (2019)**

- Washington served only 10.9 kids per 100 enrolled in free/reduced price meals. By comparison, New York State served 27.5 low income kids per 100.
- Average daily participation was 35,688 children -- an increase of 2.4% from 2018 (34,867 kids), when Washington also ranked 35th in the U.S.

### **Opportunities to Strengthen Summer Meals in 2021-23:**

- Fund Farm to Schools to Families Grants that would enable schools and community-based Summer Meals sponsors in 2021, especially, to purchase locally grown food from our farmers and ensure access to those meals is family-friendly and responsive to current conditions.

## Child Nutrition: Pandemic EBT

Modelled on an existing program called Summer EBT, Congress created a new program in response to COVID-19 to ensure eligible children (based on school meal enrollment) have nutritious food if school meals aren't available. Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) functions like food stamps: it provides food benefits on an EBT card in order to purchase groceries. P-EBT requires collaboration between school districts and OSPI, for student data, and with DSHS, who administers the benefits (as our state's SNAP agency).

In SY 2019-20, just over 560,000 K-12 students qualified for up to \$399 in P-EBT benefits. Children whose family receive Basic Food got the benefits directly on their existing EBT account (just over 241,000 children). The remaining eligible students had to complete an application for benefits before a mid-September deadline.

Unfortunately, *almost 187,000 low income children did not receive up to \$74.6 million in food assistance because they missed the application deadline.*

On September 30, Congress extended P-EBT through SY 2020-21 for eligible K-12 students (free/reduced price kids who are not attending a full week of classes in person), and expanded eligibility to certain low income children ages



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0-6 (whose family receives food stamps and have had disruptions in child care schedules). As of this writing in early December, DSHS and OSPI are developing a plan for USDA approval that would automatically issue P-EBT benefits to all eligible K-12 students. Every state is still awaiting USDA guidance on how to serve young children.

## **Child Nutrition: WIC**

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) was established as a permanent program in 1974 to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk. Participation in WIC has been shown to reduce low birth weight and pre-term births, decrease infant mortality, improve outcomes for Moms, and save Medicaid dollars.

### ***WIC Provides:***

- Supplemental foods based on participants nutritional needs including (fresh produce, whole grains, yogurt, cheese, milk, eggs, peanut butter, beans, tuna, iron fortified cereals, 100% fruit juice, infant formula and baby foods.)
- Nutrition and Breastfeeding Education and Support
- Referrals to health and other community services
- Health Assessments

WIC is a federally funded through grants from USDA to each State. In Washington State, the Department of Health contracts with 59 agencies around the State to provide WIC services at over 200 locations.

### ***WIC Eligibility:***

- WIC is a nutrition program for pregnant women, new and breastfeeding moms, and children under five.
- Dad, grandparents, and other caregivers of children under the age of five may also sign kids up for WIC.
- Foster children under age five and foster teens who are pregnant are eligible for WIC.
- If you or your family member are on Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or Basic Food you may be eligible for WIC too.
- Many working families and military families are eligible for WIC.
- WIC income eligibility is 185% of the Federal Poverty Level. (For a family of 3, the FPL is \$40,180 gross income).
- WIC is provided to all eligible families without regard to residency or citizenship status.

### ***Washington WIC Statistics:***

- WIC food benefits are issued on an EBT card. There are currently 671 authorized WIC grocery retailers.
- Nearly 50% of infants born in Washington are served by the WIC Program.
- In 2019 over 235,000 women, infants and children were served by WIC.
- In 2019 over \$85 million dollars in WIC Benefits were spent in retail grocery stores.

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### ***Changes During COVID***

WIC Services are traditionally delivered through face to face in-person appointments. With the onset of the COVID 19 Pandemic, WIC quickly moved to service delivery through remote operations over the phone or through video chat. USDA issued waivers to ease the physical presence requirement and make this possible.

Over the past 5 years WIC has seen a steady decline in caseload both nationally and here in Washington. This is in part due to an improved economy during that time, a lower birth rate, and families choosing to wait longer to have children.

Since the onset of the Pandemic, the Washington WIC Caseload has increased 13% above what was expected if the observed decline had continued. Remote WIC services have also helped to reduce the participant no-show rate. Prior to the pandemic the rate was 10-15%, and with remote services is nearly zero.

Remote WIC services are highly popular and are working well to reach women, infants, and children during this critical time.

### ***Opportunities to Strengthen WIC***

- Increased partnership with Medical Providers to share measurements and lab results would help reduce redundancies and support telemedicine/remote services.
- Increased partnership with Medical Providers and other programs could help program outreach and ensure those who are eligible for WIC are receiving services.
- Increased internet connectivity at remote WIC locations would help provide benefits more smoothly.

## **WIC Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)**

WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP) is part of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Eligible WIC participants are issued FMNP coupons in addition to their regular WIC benefits. These coupons can be used to buy eligible foods from farms stores, farmers' markets or roadside stands that have been approved by the state agency to accept FMNP coupons.

WIC FMNP is funded by both State and Federal funds.

During 2020 eligible WIC participants in Washington received \$28 in coupons for the market season each, for up to three WIC participants in a family. The Department of Health is exploring options to move to an EBT delivery system for FMNP.

WIC Farmers Market checks issued in \$4 increments each, to match other farmers market benefits available to families in Washington.

## 9 Things You Can Do to Understand Hunger in Your Communities



Visit your local food bank



Complete a Basic Food/  
combined benefits application



Visit a WIC clinic



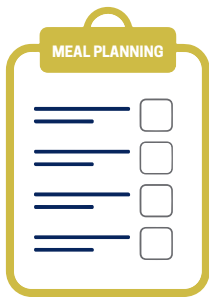
Distribute Summer Meals to kids



Read past Northwest Harvest  
*Focus on Food Security* reports &  
*Hungry in Washington* reports



Visit your local farmers market that  
accepts EBT and food access programs  
like the WIC and Senior Farmers Market  
Nutrition Programs



Examine your meal planning  
budget using USDA's Low Cost  
Food Plan



Take the SNAP Challenge:  
planning a week's worth of meals  
on a SNAP budget of \$4 per day



Visit a school kitchen or after school  
meals program (Boys and Girls Club  
or YMCA) to learn more about school  
meal needs for kids

## References

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  - Complete a Basic Food/combined benefits application - <https://www.washingtonconnection.org/prescreening/home.go?action=Introduction>
  - Visit a WIC clinic - <https://www.doh.wa.gov/youandyourfamily/wic>
  - Distribute Summer Meals to kids - [https://resources.parenthelp123.org/resource\\_finder/services/summer-meals](https://resources.parenthelp123.org/resource_finder/services/summer-meals)
  - Read past Northwest Harvest focus group reports & Hungry in Washington reports - <https://www.northwestharvest.org/resources/?topic=report#resource-list>
  - Visit your local farmers market that accepts EBT and food access programs like the WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs - <http://wafarmersmarkets.org/washingtonfarmersmarketdirectory/>
  - Examine your meal planning budget using USDA's Low Cost Food Plan - <https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu/plan/what-you-spend/>
  - Take the SNAP Challenge: planning a week's worth of meals on a SNAP budget of just \$4 per day - <https://frac.org/programs/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/take-fracs-snap-challenge>
  - Visit a school kitchen or after school meals program (Boys and Girls Club or YMCA) to learn more about school meal needs for kids

## Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition Steering Committee Contact Information

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Formed in 1990, the Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition is a statewide organization with over 900 members. Our Steering Committee is made up of key anti-hunger stakeholder groups with active grassroots networks, representing emergency food, nutrition, sustainable agriculture, and faith-based organizations. We welcome your questions, concerns, and requests for information or opportunities to meet with our members.

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