

Food Access and Public Health

(Adopted September 24, 2020)

This policy statement outlines the New Hampshire Public Health Association's (NHPHA) support for policies, programs, and practices that enhance food security among Granite State residents. The NHPHA recognizes that regular access to affordable, nutritious food is essential to promote the public's health and ensure that New Hampshire households are food secure. The USDA defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. There are various tools utilized in clinical practice to identify food insecure individuals. The American Academy of Pediatrics and other organizations advocate for the use of the validated, 2-question Hunger Vital Sign tool to screen for food insecurity at medical visits. Food insecurity is a complex issue that often does not exist in isolation, as low-income individuals are impacted by a host of complications including unaffordable housing, lack of health insurance, social isolation, and chronic health problems. Experienced together, these concerns are important social determinants of health which negatively affect a wide-range of well-being, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes.

- In 2018, 9.3% of households and 13.3% of children in New Hampshire were food insecure, and the annual food budget shortfall for all food insecure individuals in the state was \$72,230,000.
- In New Hampshire, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women Infants & Children (WIC), as well as several USDA Child Nutrition Programs are underutilized. These programs function to increase food security, eliminate hunger, and promote a healthy, sustainable diet for low-income individuals and children.
- In 2016, there were 29,500 women eligible for WIC in New Hampshire, yet only 13,800 participants with a 46.9% coverage rate.
- Rates of children who are eligible and participate in the Summer Food Service Program decreased by over 1,000 since 2017. Several factors drive underutilization, including cumbersome application processes and rural areas with a lack of transportation to food provision sites.
- Furthermore, many rural areas in the state have limited access to local food retailers with healthy options. Therefore, individuals residing in these locations face higher transportation costs to travel to grocery stores, and may also experience less variety or lower-quality fresh foods than more suburban or urban areas.

An approach to overall health through a lens focused on food access provides methods for achieving nutritious, attainable, affordable food for all; advances social justice; conserves and renews natural resources; and builds community health and vitality.

The NPHA supports food access policies, programs, and practices that:

- Ensure residents of all ages, demographics, and marginalized populations (immigrants, refugees, homeless individuals) have established and convenient access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods.
- Collaborate with sustainable food systems advocates such as the New Hampshire Food Alliance and Food Solutions New England to improve our current food economy and promote access of locally sourced, nutritious foods.
- Support outreach to low-income residents and other marginalized populations for increased opportunities to participate in federal nutrition and food assistance programs to provide greater accessibility and affordability of healthy foods for individuals and children.
- Promote donations of locally-sourced, culturally appropriate healthy food to food shelves and pantries, while supporting infrastructure and policies that keep those donations within communities.
- Incentivize supermarkets, farmer's markets, and other healthy food retailers to operate in low-income, food-insecure communities.
- Collaborate with health care sites to identify food insecure individuals and connect them with local food pantries, mobile food distribution, and federal nutrition assistance programs.

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