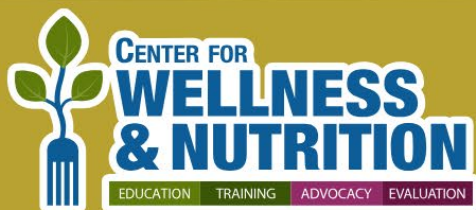


Data Sensemaking Discussion Findings

Community Reflections on Equity in Georgia SNAP-Ed Projects



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Introduction

Since 2022, several states in the Southeast Region have participated in racial equity-focused SNAP-Ed evaluations in collaboration with Public Health Institute's Center for Wellness and Nutrition (PHI CWN), including:

- **FFY2022:** Formative evaluation to identify strategies to ensure that a racial equity lens is used in the context of the *SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework* (GA, MS, NC, SC)
- **FFY2023:** Process evaluation to capture the lived experiences of SNAP-Ed participants through feedback groups and an online survey (GA, NC, SC)
- **FFY2024:** A workforce assessment of racial equity across the implementing agencies (IAs), based on ASNNA's Guiding Principles to Embed Equity in SNAP-Ed and the PRAXIS Standard of Equity (GA, NC, SC)

According to the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity Practice Guide](#), it is important that evaluation involves *"the community in interpreting the results to make sure that progress or lack of progress is accurately understood and contextualized, and decisions for improvement are properly informed."* In alignment with [PHI CWN's Health Equity & Racial Justice Platform](#), PHI CWN believes community members who experience health and racial disparities have the best solutions for their own communities. Community members must be informed and engaged as decision-makers in the systemic change process.

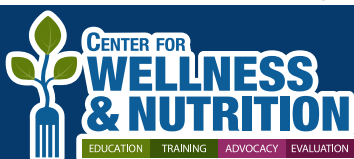
In federal fiscal year 2024 (FFY2024), the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) program partnered with PHI CWN to engage in data sensemaking discussions with SNAP-Ed eligible community members to reflect on results from the racial equity assessments conducted in [FFY2022](#) and [FFY2023](#).

The aim of the data sensemaking discussions was to provide a space for SNAP-Ed eligible community members (i.e. households with income that is less than or equal to 185% of the federal poverty level) to come together in a culturally responsive and equitable way to make sense of results, increase ownership of the data, and to identify additional needs to address racial equity in SNAP-Ed in Georgia.

Methods

Data sensemaking discussions, sometimes referred to as data parties or data jams, are a process by which people give meaning to data based on lived experience. For this project, two data sensemaking discussions were conducted via Zoom with SNAP-Ed community members in Georgia.

In preparation for the sensemaking session, key findings from the previous equity assessments were highlighted in a PowerPoint presentation created by PHI CWN. The presentation was recorded and shared for feedback with the Georgia SNAP-Ed Community Advisory Board (CAB). The CAB is a group of Georgia residents who are current or previous SNAP-Ed recipients. Based on their lived experiences, CAB members offer insightful feedback, advice, and guidance to DFCS on the GA SNAP-



Ed program, which becomes incorporated into the final data sensemaking discussions.

During the data sensemaking discussions, results from the previous SNAP-Ed equity assessments were presented ([link to presentation](#)). Participants were asked if they had any questions about the findings, then asked to reflect on the results. The questions guiding the discussion were:

- Are the results reflective of your lived experience? Why or why not?
- What are the stories or narratives missing from the data?
- Based on the data shared, what recommendations do you have to improve racial equity in SNAP-Ed?

Participants for the sessions were recruited through word-of-mouth from CAB members and from staff at the Georgia SNAP-Ed implementing agencies. Participants received a \$25 gift card for expenses related to their participation in the data sensemaking discussions. The data sensemaking discussion project was submitted to and considered exempt by the PHI's Institutional Review Board.

Results

There were 12 SNAP-Ed eligible participants across both sessions - eight people attended an April 2024 session and four people attended a June 2024 session. Demographic information was not collected from participants.

Participant Questions about the Data

Participants had the opportunity to provide feedback and ask questions related to the data presentation. Some had concerns regarding survey methodology. One participant asked if pictures were added to the survey and stated that visuals would be helpful for those with differing learning abilities or literacy issues. Others were curious if the Spanish translation of the survey was vetted by local Spanish speakers, to ensure that the Spanish was of the appropriate regional dialect. Participants also reflected on the term "SNAP-Ed," and questioned its usage in the survey materials as the term is not widely known.

"Even though it's intended to be inclusive, [SNAP-Ed] is an educational platform. I just question whether or not it's clear that it is a service to all age groups...it would imply [it's] a school program for school children. It's just that the name doesn't really illustrate what it is. So, I just question whether or not the participation and participants, even those participating in the survey would understand that this is something that they could potentially have access to."

Participants also questioned the recruitment process for the survey and suggested expanding recruitment efforts to those with limited access to technology.

"For example, we're hosting a Zoom call today for conference, for feedback, for opinions on how we could do better with SNAP-Ed...so was

there any other outlet that could be reached to people that don't have a smartphone and don't have a tablet or laptop?"

One participant was curious as to how SNAP-Ed resources were being evaluated across the state of Georgia, and if the results were translating into actionable steps based on the data findings.

"Because data, if we're talking about being data driven then we have to have SMART goals. They have to be specific, measurable, attainable results, oriented and time bound right? Otherwise, a lot of money goes into research. But then what happens then?"

Results Reflective of Lived Experience

Many participants agreed that the results were reflective of their lived experience. However, some participants stated that the day-to-day situation is worse than what was presented in the data. Many participants expressed their experience with difficulty in accessing food. When discussing nutrition security, one participant stated: **"Unfortunately, I live in a food desert."** In addition, other participants experienced issues with limited transportation to access food, and some stated there is an issue of food apartheid where they live.

"When we say food deserts, here especially in our region where there is this push on industrialism, there is more of a food apartheid issue where communities are deliberately being distanced from access to fresh food sources, as in convenience stores, or even older grocery store settings where they might have had, like a Dave's Super Duper. They're being bought out, torn down, and warehouses are being built in their place. And there's a lack of transportation to those fresh food areas. I find that's really impacting communities of low wealth, not just in my area, but in other areas around Georgia."

Other participants agreed with this sentiment of food apartheid, in addition to agreeing that the price of food is higher than in 2023.

"Food is insanely expensive. I went to the grocery store a couple days ago, and I used to be able to get 4 ears of corn for \$3. It's \$7 now...Food is not equitable anymore. It's not accessible. It's not affordable."

Missing Stories or Narratives

Participants also shared missing stories or narratives that were not reflected in the findings. One person stated that they felt that culturally relevant narratives were missing from Hispanic, Asian, immigrant, and Indigenous communities. Another shared that they thought military families' experiences were excluded. One participant stated:

"I also feel that SNAP-Ed is missing the mark on culturally correct cooking. The cookbook I was provided was really heavy in canned foods – it didn't have any touch points with fresh, heritage foods."

There was also discussion that the data from FFY2023 focused on food and nutrition security, but did not address other social determinants of health affecting the communities, such as expenses related to housing, healthcare, and transportation.

“We're not only in a food crisis, but we're in a housing crisis...When you talk about food scarcity, just not having enough food, you can also talk about the fact that if they don't have enough food, what other resources don't they have? The rent is now double, and the light bill is extremely high. So, if they're missing food, you know, they're missing medication.”

Also, participants shared about the difficulty in applying for and receiving SNAP benefits. One participant shared that she is 71 years old, and her SNAP benefit is under \$40 per month. Others stated that qualifications for SNAP benefits only factor in income, and do not consider other expenses, such as medical bills, insurance, or childcare costs. A few people reported that they barely exceeded the income threshold to qualify for SNAP, and therefore did not have the ability to purchase food and went hungry as a result.

Additional Recommendations to Improve Equity in SNAP-Ed

When asked for additional recommendations to improve equity in SNAP-Ed, there was a heavy emphasis on community togetherness and gardens. With the rising cost of food and because SNAP allows seed purchases, recommendations centered on community gardening.

“Start a garden, make it a community garden and allow people to volunteer.... When you make it a community thing, it can help so many others... When it comes to a garden, multiple people eat.”

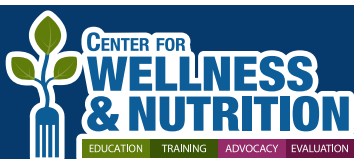
Participants reminisced of life growing up on farms, when more collaboration between families and communities occurred to make sure everyone was fed.

“They cooked the meal that was big enough for more than one family, for multiple people. So, if we can, and I really, truly believe that we're going have to go back to that – feeding a community with one meal.”

Other suggestions included promoting farmers markets that accept SNAP benefits and increased communication about the various benefits of SNAP, such as the ability to purchase seeds for gardening. One participant suggested that more wraparound services need to be provided through SNAP-Ed, to be able to connect people to SNAP as well as other resources, like health, housing, and transportation.

There was also discussion about trust in SNAP-Ed and that trusted members of the community and schools should be helping with program recruitment.

“An ambassador or somebody who is from the community to help recruit individuals to participate in activities like this, as well as activities like SNAP-Ed...and then the school system is a great addition too.”



Participants expressed their recommendations that more people need to hear about SNAP-Ed. Suggestions included developing partnerships to support the promotion of SNAP-Ed, such as public service announcements on TV, radio, and social media platforms.

“But it's just that nutrition information is so vital. And it's so important because we're getting to a moment in time where food is medicine. If we have access to nutritious food, then we are less likely to need medication.”

Limitations

With this project, individuals who joined the data sensemaking discussions may have been more interested in supporting work with SNAP-Ed, and therefore advocates of the program. Furthermore, because the discussions were held virtually, it is likely they missed the perspectives of individuals with limited access to the internet and technology.

Discussion

The data sensemaking discussions were a valuable opportunity to reflect on results from FFY2022 and FFY2023 assessments that aimed to better understand racial equity in SNAP-Ed. By hearing directly from the SNAP-Ed eligible community, the discussions gained valuable insights from the lived experience of those most affected by SNAP-Ed programming and added missing narratives to the findings.

Participants' questions about the findings centered around methodology and highlighted important processes that should be considered in future data collection efforts, including adding pictures for low-literacy populations, checking translations with local residents, and offering options for in-person and virtual data collection.

While most respondents agreed that the results seemed reflective of their lived experience, some expressed that the day-to-day situation for some is worse, with many struggling with food access. They also felt that the findings did not reflect other issues faced by the community including difficulty in applying for SNAP benefits, SNAP benefits not being sufficient to meet the needs of some families, and lack of access to transportation and affordable housing.

Recommendations

Recommendations to improve health and racial equity in SNAP-Ed programming and evaluation efforts include:

- Create opportunities to share data and conduct sensemaking discussions with community members in-person and virtually to ensure that community members are centered in the data and that data collection processes are transparent and accountable.
- Include stories, when possible, to complement quantitative data to center lived experiences of the SNAP-Ed eligible community, paying particular

attention to including culturally relevant perspectives from diverse populations.

- Take a more holistic approach to evaluating food and nutrition security, considering other social determinants of health, such as transportation, housing and income.
- Enhance referral systems to assist individuals in accessing SNAP benefits. According to the SNAP-Ed Guidance, "FNS encourages SNAP-Ed agencies to refer participants to SNAP Outreach partners and/or to SNAP State and local offices for SNAP benefit information and assistance."
- Focus on social connectedness through gardening projects to foster connection through improved food and nutrition security.
- Increase outreach, marketing and communication in different formats and across different platforms regarding what SNAP-Ed services and programs are available to community members.
- Identify community residents who can support promotion and recruitment for SNAP-Ed events, including data sensemaking sessions, nutrition education classes and other events.

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