

UC San Diego

Independent Study Projects

Title

Raising Awareness of the CalFresh (Food Stamp) Program in Downtown San Diego

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/56b7f5mq>

Author

Niemiec, Steve

Publication Date

2016

ISP-CS1

Community Service CATEGORY

April 1, 2016

Final ISP Project

Author: Steve Niemiec

Committee: Sunny Smith, MD (chair), Michelle Johnson, MD, and Amanda Schultz, MPH

Title: Raising Awareness of the CalFresh (Food Stamp) Program in Downtown San Diego

Rationale for the Project:

The Food and Agriculture Organization defines food security as having, at all times, “physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet [one’s] dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” Astoundingly, 16.1% of Americans are food insecure (1). In an effort to combat food insecurity, a Food Stamp Program was established with the goal of alleviating “hunger and malnutrition... by increasing food purchasing power for all eligible households who apply for participation” (2). This program, now nationally named the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or CalFresh in California, is a government funded nutrition assistance program that is grossly underutilized in California, particularly in San Diego County.

In 2012, 6.4 million individuals in California, 17.1% of the state’s population, were considered to be food insecure (3). While CalFresh was designed to combat this staggering number, California has the lowest enrollment rate (53%) of any state among eligible persons, and San Diego has the lowest enrollment rate (40%) of any urban county (4). In 2008, an estimated \$105 million in benefits were left unclaimed by individuals in San Diego. Other urban cities, including San Antonio, TX and Miami, FL have markedly higher enrollment rates among eligible persons at 78% and 91%, respectively (4). One in 2 children will be on food stamps within their life time (5). San Diego has over 45,000 children under the poverty level and 159,400 children in San Diego County suffer from food insecurity (6).

It is well understood that food insecurity has negative consequences on an individual’s health. A child in a food insecure home is 1.74 times as likely to suffer fair or poor health and 1.33 times more likely to be hospitalized compared to a child in a food secure home (7). A child receiving SNAP is less likely to be underweight and is at lower risk for suffering developmental delays (8). Food insecurity is also associated with a higher risk for developing cardiovascular risk factors such as hypertension and hyperlipidemia (9), and high body mass index (10). In adolescents, food insecurity is also associated with reduced psychosocial functioning (10).

In 2005, the San Diego Hunger Coalition (SDHC) was created in an effort to end food insecurity in San Diego County, in part by increasing participation in the CalFresh program. By 2009, the SDHC enrolled nearly 3,000 individuals in SNAP, equivalent to over \$5,000,000 that enters the local economy (11). It is estimated that for every dollar of SNAP that is utilized, an estimated \$1.79 is generated in the local economy (12). In 2008, SDHC teamed up with the San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) and local Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to create the Food Stamp Taskforce with the purpose of raising CalFresh enrollment in San Diego County. The Taskforce helps to “identify barriers to access, educate community outreach partners about CalFresh policies and procedures, and provide HHSA with feedback and best practices for increasing eligible enrollment” (13). While the SDHC and

other local non-profits have helped improve CalFresh utilization, San Diego County continues to have the lowest enrollment rate in the nation, and further help is needed to raise SNAP participation.

Objectives

What are the goals of the project?

General:

The primary goal of the project is to raise awareness of CalFresh in the Downtown San Diego area through information sharing and by facilitating linkages among community organizations, including San Diego Hunger Coalition, with the goal of increasing CalFresh enrollment.

Specific:

As part of the Yellow Sol Academic Community, the medical student took part in a Downtown Community Assessment of the CalFresh program. The goal of the community assessment was to identify resources within the Downtown community and to identify needs not met by these resources (e.g. high rate of food insecurity, high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, low rate of high school graduation). In this process, the student met with Amanda Schultz of San Diego Hunger Coalition to discuss barriers in San Diego CalFresh enrollment and ways the UCSD School of Medicine could help play a role. Potential barriers to address included lack of public awareness of the CalFresh program and difficulty for homeless individuals to successfully apply without same-day enrollment programs. This meeting sparked interest in the current project.

Specific goals of this project include:

1. Investigate SNAP programs in urban cities such as San Antonio, TX and Miami, FL with high enrollment rates among eligible individuals.
2. Increase awareness of the SNAP/CalFresh program in the Downtown San Diego community by placing information brochures in public venues. In this process, the student will also help foster connections between SDHC and the downtown community.
3. Increase knowledge of food security and CalFresh at UCSD Student Run Free Clinic Sites. The Golden Avenue UCSD Free Clinic site at Lemon Grove Academy is currently partnered with Feeding America to provide a food pantry for patients at the clinic and families at the school. Feeding America supplies fresh food and canned/package food to Golden Avenue every other week to give to the families and patients at the school. The leftover food is then stored in a food pantry from which students can get food during the week if they or their family are ever short on food. The student will aim to work with Feeding America to establish a teaching program to help this population learn more about food insecurity and to debunk myths about CalFresh enrollment.
4. Establish monthly same-day enrollment programs at the San Diego Public Library and First Lutheran Church (Downtown site of UCSD Student Run Free Clinic). Amanda Schultz of SDHC indicated that Feeding America has started a pilot program of mobile units that are trained to enroll eligible individuals in a single day, rather than the normal multiple-day process. She indicated these mobile units were especially useful for enrolling the transient homeless population. A goal of this project will be to work with Feeding America to establish additional sites for same-day enrollment.
5. Target families in partner San Diego schools (e3Civic High School and Monarch School) who are already on free or reduced lunch programs to encourage and facilitate application for CalFresh.
6. Meet with Family Resource Center and other Community Based Organizations (CBOs) already involved in enrolling patients in CalFresh or serving the underserved to identify best practices

and to identify areas in need of improvement. Work with SDHC to facilitate ongoing best practice partnerships and feedback processes with these organizations.

7. Identify medical students to continue this project and develop a long-term community outreach program
8. Assess continuity and effectiveness of this project in raising CalFresh awareness and enrollment

Methods and Achievements:

1. Goal 1 – Investigate SNAP programs in urban cities such as San Antonio, TX and Miami, FL with high enrollment rates among eligible individuals.

In an effort to gather information on successful SNAP programs in urban cities, phone calls were made to the Miami Food Bank, San Antonio Food Bank (SAFB), and the New York City Coalition Against Hunger (NYCCAH). The interviews conducted were geared at assessing information about the program, barriers to SNAP enrollment, successful programs, difficult to reach populations, etc. The medical student conducted an interview with Sari Vatske, the Vice President of Community Relations at Miami Food Bank. The main impressions of the interview include:

- a. Miami Food Bank enrolls approximately 60 SNAP applications monthly in addition to food pantry and soup kitchen referrals
- b. All sites of enrollment and outreach are accessible to public transportation
- c. As of March 2014, they were unable to perform same-day enrollment as they do not do interviews for their enrollees; however, they regularly check persons' statuses in the system and make frequent follow-up calls
- d. As a predominantly Spanish-speaking population, the majority of their staff are bilingual speakers.

The medical student interview with Mike Sevas, director of the San Antonio Food Bank, highlighted:

- a. A highly collaborative approach is encouraged as they work with over 500 partner organizations to cover 16 counties. Partner organizations include HR departments and local workforce boards that help keep tabs on companies going out of business or with recently laid-off workers who may benefit from SNAP. Other partner organizations include WIC, homeless shelters, pregnancy clinics, schools, etc.
- b. They have a set form given to each partner organization that includes a client's name, contact number, and a list of services needed. This form is then faxed to SAFB whenever a partner organization meets a person who may benefit from SNAP. SAFB stressed frequent follow-up with partner organizations to keep them involved.
- c. Health and community fairs, particularly on holidays, seem to garner the best outreach, although specific enrollment numbers were unavailable.

The medical student additionally conducted an interview with Jim Wangler of the NYCCAH. The main impressions of the interview include:

- a. Best sites for outreach have been supermarkets (weekly advertisement with NYCCAH telephone number in the store's coupon ad), farmers' markets, WIC, and community health centers.
- b. Emphasized that encouraging enrollment has been a very long term process (decades) in New York
- c. Free cell phone programs in New York City have helped maintain contact with homeless enrollees

The medical student used this information to help guide the remainder of his project. A follow-up e-mail with successes of the medical student project was shared with these organizations, but no response was garnered.

2. Goal 2 – Increase awareness of the SNAP/CalFresh program in the Downtown San Diego community by placing information brochures in public venues.

San Diego Hunger Coalition and San Diego Food Bank brochures were gathered and distribution was attempted in public venues in downtown San Diego. The medical student chose public venues that accepted SNAP dollars and that were in close proximity to Family Resource Centers or other enrollment locations. As recommend by NYCCAH, grocery stores were selected because if a client uses SNAP at their store, the store makes money, incentivizing the store to encourage enrollment. 10 public venues were chosen including 7-11s, local grocery and liquor stores, and the public library.

Brochures were difficult to place due to grocery stores being state or national organizations, and they require authorization on the company-scale, authorization a local site manager was unable to provide. Additional downsides of the brochure process is the difficulty in tracking the impact of the brochure and staffing someone to replace the brochures once a store runs out.

3. Goal 3 – Increase knowledge of food security and CalFresh at UCSD Student Run Free Clinic Sites.

The student met with Feeding America San Diego (FASD) to build off of Feeding America's involvement at Lemon Grove Academy. A partnership between FASD and First Lutheran Church/TACO was established (see below, Goal 4). The medical student wrote an IRB waiver application to allow for food security screening at the UCSD Student Run Free Clinic sites. Food security screening at the UCSD SRFC was implemented in projects by other medical student designed to continue and enhance the current project (see below, goals 7/8). Between March and May of 2015, 60 medical students and residents had been trained by the SDHC on food security screening.

As of March 2016, over 400 free clinic patients had been both screened for food security and surveyed on their barriers to accessing CalFresh and other food resources. 74% are food insecure. Over 50% of individuals surveyed were not utilizing food banks, and among those eligible for CalFresh but not receiving benefits, over 1/3 cite lack of information or fear of immigration as barriers. These surveys, to be fully analyzed in future projects, highlight the food insecurity in UCSD SRFC patients and areas of education on which we may focus to help reduce the barriers keeping eligible individuals from enrolling.

The student additionally participated in the CalFresh Challenge, during which he lived on a food budget of \$33.67, the average weekly SNAP allotment in San Diego. He wrote a journal response of his experiences which was shared with Marcia Garcia (CalFresh Outreach Coordinator at the SDHC) to be posted on the SDHC website.

4. Goal 4 – Establish monthly same-day enrollment programs at the San Diego Public Library and First Lutheran Church (Downtown site of UCSD Student Run Free Clinic).

The medical student met with Feeding America and San Diego Food Bank to discuss the logistics required for same-day enrollment. The Downtown San Diego Public Library was identified as a possible site for this process and the student partnered with San Diego Food Bank

in an effort to implement the program there. San Diego Food Bank was doing monthly screening at the library prior to the student's involvement, but not many persons were showing up for screening. The student met with San Diego Food Bank administration to brainstorm ways to increase awareness of the program. Brochures (as above) were placed in the library and the medical student passed out fliers to individuals entering the library. After discussion of the logistics of same-day enrollment, SDFB did not feel that it would be beneficial to pilot at the Downtown public library given the low attendance at the screening seminars.

As Feeding America already had an existing relationship with the UCSD SRFC, the medical student partnered with Feeding America and Jim Lovell, director of the Third Avenue Charitable Organization (TACO) to discuss the implementation of same-day enrollment at the Downtown free clinic site. The student and free clinic Social Workers participated in training to perform CalFresh screening. In conjunction with Jim Lovell, Feeding America, and Drs. Michelle Johnson and Sunny Smith, the medical student implemented the first successful same-day enrollment program in San Diego County. Since its implementation, over 50 persons have been enrolled at TACO. The pilot's success provided a model for seven additional same-day enrollment sites throughout San Diego, including at a second UCSD SRFC site (Pacific Beach United Methodist Church). The medical student helped to partner FASD with Beth Rhodes, executive director for Shoreline Community Services at the Pacific Beach United Methodist Church.

An article from the San Diego Hunger Coalition on the same-day enrollment programs: <http://www.sandiegohungercoalition.org/blog/2016/1/20/same-day-service-a-better-way-to-help-homeless-with-calfresh>

5. Goal 5 – Target families in partner San Diego schools (e3Civic High School and Monarch School) who are already on free or reduced lunch programs to encourage and facilitate application for CalFresh.

To gather information on successful enrollment programs in schools, the medical student reached out to Dr. Shaila Serpas, who is very involved with the Sweetwater School district. She indicated that the school nurses are often the best resources for connecting students and families to Family Resource Centers for enrollment.

The student attended a “family dinner” at Monarch School, where all student families are invited to a dinner at which they have information booths and other event. UCSD School of Medicine provided influenza vaccines at this event and this medical student created a booth where he provided families with information about CalFresh and referred families to the San Diego Food Bank screening days at the Downtown Public Library (as above). SDFB expressed interest in establishing school programs and in attending additional “family dinners,” so the medical student established a partnership between SDFB and Rosemary Jaworski, school nurse at Monarch.

6. Goal 6 – Meet with Family Resource Center and other Community Based Organizations (CBOs)

The medical student met with San Diego Food Bank, Feeding America San Diego, Third Avenue Charitable Organization, BAME Community Development Program, and San Diego Hunger Coalition. The student gathered information on CalFresh practices and barriers, and provided resources to and connections amongst CBOs.

7. Goals 7 & 8 – Identify medical students to continue this project and develop a long-term community outreach program; Assess continuity and effectiveness of this project in raising CalFresh awareness and enrollment.

The project was initiated as a second year medical student with transition of leadership during the medical student's third year. The medical student partnered with David Malinak, a fellow medical student in the UCSD Class of 2017. David assisted the medical student in finalizing the above projects, particularly the establishment of the same-day enrollment process with TACO, FASD, and the UCSD Student Run Free Clinic. David additionally expanded upon the project, screening all patients at the free clinic for food security. He established a randomized control trial at the clinic in which he provided nutrition classes and 44lbs of free healthy food to diabetics. Since its initiation, the medical student and David's projects have helped see over 50 individuals enrolled in CalFresh, over 400 patients screened for food insecurity, and over 100 diabetics provided with free healthy food on a monthly basis. The food security screening has been continued and further developed by undergraduates at UCSD, and David's project was successfully passed on to and further developed by Jinnie Chang, a medical student in the UCSD Class of 2018. The medical student returned during his fourth year of medical school to assist in expanding same-day enrollment to the Pacific Beach Methodist Church and to write an IRB, as explained above.

The student additionally presented the development of this project at the Learning Communities Institute Conference in October of 2014. A poster on "Universal food insecurity screening and referrals within Student-run Free Clinics" was presented at the UCSD Public Health Conference.

References:

1. Feeding America. 2010 Food Insecurity & Food Cost in the US: Nationwide [Fact Sheet]. 2012. <http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hungerstudies/map-the-meal-gap.aspx>
2. U.S. House. 95th Congress, H.R. 2649. Food Stamp Act (P.L. 108-269). July 2, 2004.
3. Feeding America. 2010 Food Insecurity & Food Cost in the US: California [Fact Sheet]. 2012. <http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hungerstudies/map-the-meal-gap.aspx>
4. Food and Research Action Center. SNAP Access in Urban America: A City-by-City Snapshot. 2011. http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/urbansnapreport_jan2011.pdf
5. *A Place at the Table*. Dir. Kristi Jacobson and Lori Silverbush. Participant Media, 2013. DVD.
6. San Diego Hunger Coalition. School Food Security & Nutrition Assessment. August 2012. http://gallery.mailchimp.com/0b17f3bb9b68bc4ea5aec6de9/files/10.24_SNAG.pdf
7. Chilton, M., Black, M. M., Berkowitz, C., Casey, P. H., Cook, J., Cutts, D. et al. Food Insecurity and Risk of Poor Health among US-Born Children of Immigrants. *American Journal of Public Health*, 2009 Mar, 99(3): 556-562.

8. Rose-Jacobs, R., Black, M. M., Casey, P. H., Cook, J. T., Cutts, D. B., Chilton, M. et al. Household Food Insecurity: Associations with at-risk Infant and Toddler Development. *Pediatrics*, 2008 Jan, 121(1): 65-72.
9. Seligman, H. K., Laraia, B. A., & Kushel, M. B. Food Insecurity is Associated with Chronic Disease among Low-Income NHANES Participants. *Journal of Nutrition*, 2010 Feb, 140(2): 304-310.
10. Olson, C. M. Nutrition and Health Outcomes Associated with Food Insecurity and Hunger. *Journal of Nutrition*, 1999 Feb, 129(2): 5215-45.
11. San Diego Hunger Coalition. 2009 Annual Report.
<http://www.sandiegohungercoalition.org/sites/default/files/2009-Annual-Report.pdf>
12. Hanson, K. The Food Assistance Input-Output Multiplier (FANIOM) Model and Stimulus Effects of SNAP. USDA Economic Research Report No. (ERR-103), 2010 Oct.
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err103.aspx#.UpwR6cRDuSq>
13. San Diego Hunger Coalition. CalFresh: General Overview.
<http://www.sandiegohungercoalition.org/calfresh>