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Defunding SNAP-Ed: The Impact on California's Health Departments & Communities

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Defunding SNAP-Ed:

The Impact on California's Health Departments & Communities

Research Brief – July 2026

Background

For over three decades, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) worked to improve nutrition and physical activity (PA) behaviors among low-resource populations through a combination of education and policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change approaches.

In California, SNAP-Ed was known as CalFresh Healthy Living and was implemented through multiple agencies, including the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). CDPH disseminated SNAP-Ed funds to all 61 local health departments (LHDs), who partnered with community organizations in settings like schools, early care and education, and food assistance to implement programming tailored to the unique needs of their community. In July 2025, the passage of H.R. 1 defunded the SNAP-Ed program.

What We Evaluated

To determine the impact of the SNAP-Ed funding loss, Nutrition Policy Institute surveyed and interviewed 28 LHDs randomly selected to represent all CA regions and SNAP-Ed funding allocations. The survey gathered data on the impacts on staffing and other sources of funding for nutrition and PA work, while the semi-structured interviews explored more broadly the anticipated impacts on nutrition and PA promotion capacity and coordination.

To complement LHD perspectives and provide statewide context, researchers conducted a parallel interview with two members of CDPH Nutrition and Physical Activity Branch leadership.

What We Found

SNAP-Ed was the primary funding source for nutrition and PA work

Nearly all LHDs (87%) relied on SNAP-Ed as their primary source of nutrition and PA funding. Without SNAP-Ed, nearly half (48%) anticipate laying off staff, and more than four in five (82%) will redirect staff to programs not related to nutrition and PA.

Similarly, SNAP-Ed funded about 90% of the CDPH Nutrition and Physical Activity Branch. Over three-quarters of the Branch's staff have been redirected to other programs.

Many LHD-led nutrition and PA efforts are unlikely to continue

"My gut reaction to that question is sad because I think it's that none of it is going to continue. We don't have any other funding in our department right now that is directly related to nutrition and physical activity... CalFresh Healthy Living SNAP-Ed was our main lifeline to doing that work."

— LHD Program Services Coordinator

LHDs worked in the final year of funding to build capacity of community partners to continue programming

"We created Rethink Your Drink Kits, we created Inside Classroom Garden Kits, Outside Classroom Garden Kits, a nutrition education

box, physical activity kits... So we're trying to do everything we can to give them everything they need with the hopes that maybe they'll be able to do it."

— LHD Project Director

However, long-term sustainability is a concern, as community organizations have competing priorities and programming often depends on champions.

"...if the champions of each of those programs – it's usually one or two for CATCH, one or two for gardens – if that person leaves, then that knowledge likely leaves with them."

— LHD Project Director

CDPH similarly developed resources and systems for LHDs to promote sustainability of nutrition and PA efforts

"We will have a CalFresh Healthy Living archive section on our website where a lot of materials will still be accessible. We've created online Teams channels as well as a Collaboration Hub for spaces where local health departments can share documents and talk with each other. In addition, we prioritized in our last year of funding finishing an evergreen suite of resources focused on coalition and partnership building, community level policy, advancing equity, reducing sugary drink consumption, reaching and impacting youth, and community level PSE work."

— CDPH Equity & Strategic Alignment Manager

Select initiatives may be transitioned to other LHD departments

Examples included the Oral Health and Tobacco Departments for healthy beverage and healthy retail initiatives, respectively.

"The other program that could sustain one aspect of the nutrition program is the local oral health program. They can promote the Potter the Otter books, they can talk about Rethink Your Drink."

— LHD Health Division Manager

LHDs are being forced to shift priorities away from nutrition and PA

They described decreased capacity for health promotion activities.

"...across California, without SNAP-Ed funding, we see the infrastructure for prevention of diet-related disease just crumbling."

— LHD Director of Nutrition & Physical Activity Programs

They also may play less of a role in the coordination of jurisdiction-wide efforts related to nutrition and PA.

"I announced that our staff would not be able to staff the coalition anymore... the goal is that we would maintain it, but the county would not oversee it or staff it anymore, and that it would be more of a community focused collaborative."

— LHD Program Manager

Partnerships between LHDs and community organizations are expected to weaken

LHDs played a vital role in coordination, training, and technical assistance.

"They were really relying on us to be that underlying kind of backbone of it and to provide information and resources... So even for the places where we weren't in that direct day-to-day role, we still were stepping in fairly regularly to help train and retrain."

— LHD Program Manager

Child-serving organizations are expected to feel the greatest impacts.

"I'm just not going to have the capacity to keep up that level of work with [the early childhood community]. And that's too bad because that's an area that really needs support. And it's so impactful for lifelong healthy eating and physical activity. All of that starts so young."

— LHD SNAP-Ed Project Director

The loss of access to education and health-promoting environments may lead to increased risk of chronic disease among community members

"I expect that a lot of our community health gains will decrease... obesity, diabetes, chronic diseases - those are the places where I'm expecting to see some impacts."

— LHD Program Administrator

CDPH seeks to preserve its longstanding expertise and leadership in policy-focused strategies to promote healthy eating and active living

"Preserving the subject matter expertise of the people in our branch to the extent that we can and being able to preserve the branch as a dedicated nutrition and physical activity body for the state is very important."

— CDPH Nutrition & Physical Activity Branch Manager

"We're hopeful that as a part of our vision for continuing to be a source of expertise and TA

that we will be able to secure funding to stay in that space and really serve as a state-level expert on public health nutrition and PA interventions."

— CDPH Equity & Strategic Alignment Manager

Implications & Conclusions

In the last year of funding, LHDs and CDPH focused on building local capacity to continue SNAP-Ed-initiated programming through efforts like training, sharing resources, and creating opportunities for peer support.

Despite these efforts, California will feel the loss of SNAP-Ed in considerable ways. The backbone of chronic disease prevention infrastructure may weaken, health department priorities may shift, subject matter expertise may be lost, long-standing relationships may wane, and community health, especially in the most vulnerable populations, may suffer.

To keep nutrition and physical activity at the forefront of chronic disease prevention, alternative funding is needed to fill the gap left by SNAP-Ed.

For More Information

Learn more about [NPI's CalFresh Healthy Living evaluation and access legacy resources](#)

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