

# What is SNAP-Ed and Why is it Vital to Our State

## What is SNAP-Ed?

**SNAP-Ed** is a program that helps people with low incomes learn how to eat healthy and stay active. It is part of **SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)**, which helps families buy food when money is tight. While SNAP gives money for groceries, **SNAP-Ed teaches people how to make smart food choices on a budget to live healthier lives.**

SNAP-Ed works in schools, senior centers, community gardens, grocery stores, food banks and community centers to help **make healthy eating and exercise easier for everyone.** It does this in three main ways:

- ✓ **Teaching Nutrition:** Fun, hands-on lessons to help kids and adults learn about healthy eating and staying active. (Direct Education - DE)
- ✓ **Improving Communities:** Helping schools, stores, and neighborhoods offer better food options and safe places to be active. (Policies, systems, and environments - PSE)
- ✓ **Sharing Healthy Messages:** Using TV, social media, and posters to remind people about good nutrition and exercise. (Social marketing campaigns – SM)

By working with local groups, SNAP-Ed helps families and communities build healthier habits, making it easier to eat well and move more every day.

## How Does SNAP-Ed Work?

Each year, states receive **SNAP-Ed funding** to support programs that teach people how to eat healthy and stay active. States then partner with **universities, health departments, nonprofits, and Tribal organizations** to run these programs. These groups work with **local schools, food banks, farmers' markets, and community centers** to bring nutrition education and physical activity programs directly to people who need them.

SNAP-Ed doesn't just teach healthy habits—it also **helps create lasting changes** in communities. By working with local businesses, schools, and policymakers, SNAP-Ed helps make **healthy food more available and safe spaces for exercise more accessible.** This effort strengthens our country's **\$160 billion investment in food and nutrition security**, making sure SNAP and other food assistance programs have a bigger, long-term impact on public health.

## How Is SNAP-Ed Different from EFNEP?

SNAP-Ed and EFNEP both help people with low incomes learn about healthy eating, but they work in different ways:

- ✓ **Who Runs Them:** SNAP-Ed is funded by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and run by state agencies. EFNEP is funded by the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and delivered by land-grant universities.
- ✓ **Who They Serve:** SNAP-Ed reaches a broad range of people eligible for SNAP, including individuals, families, and whole communities. EFNEP focuses more on low-income families with young children and youth with limited resources.
- ✓ **What They Do:** SNAP-Ed combines **nutrition education with policy and community changes** to make healthy choices easier. EFNEP focuses on **hands-on, peer-led lessons** to improve personal nutrition habits.
- ✓ **Where They Work:** SNAP-Ed partners with **schools, food banks, farmers' markets, and other community organizations.** EFNEP is provided through **Cooperative Extension programs at universities.**

Both programs play a key role in improving health and food access, but SNAP-Ed works at both the **individual and community level**, while EFNEP focuses more on **personal and family behavior change**.

## What Are the Benefits of SNAP-Ed?

Since the 1990s, SNAP-Ed has helped states make real progress in improving health. Over **200 studies** show its impact, including:

- ✓ **Reduce hunger** by teaching families how to stretch their food budget.
- ✓ **Increase fruit and vegetable consumption** so people eat healthier.
- ✓ **Promote physical activity** to support overall well-being.
- ✓ **Lower obesity rates** by encouraging better food choices and active lifestyles.
- ✓ **Save money**—for every **\$1 spent on SNAP-Ed, society benefits by \$5 to \$7** in reduced healthcare costs and improved productivity.
- ✓ **Smarter shopping** – Improved budgeting skills and fewer families running out of food before month's end.
- ✓ **Stronger communities** – Areas with more SNAP-Ed programs see better nutrition and more active lifestyles.

SNAP-Ed is a smart investment that helps communities live healthier while making the most of federal nutrition funding.

## The Challenge in NC: Limited Access to Healthy Food & Fitness

Over **40 million Americans** live in areas where it's easier to buy soda than fresh fruit. In North Carolina, nearly **1 in 4 children** face hunger every day. Many communities, both urban and rural, lack grocery stores that offer affordable, nutritious food.

Between 2018 and 2020, **12.1% of North Carolina households** struggled with food insecurity. By 2021, that number grew to **1.2 million people**.

Poor nutrition and lack of physical activity contribute to **serious health problems** like diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. In North Carolina, **diabetes rates have doubled in the past decade**, leading to more disabilities and higher healthcare costs.

**Children who experience hunger are at greater risk for chronic diseases**, which impacts their long-term health and increases medical expenses for families and communities. Ensuring access to healthy food is essential for improving public health and strengthening local economies.

## North Carolina SNAP-Ed Supports Healthier Communities

The **NC Department of Health and Human Services** works with **nine agencies** to bring nutrition education and healthier environments to communities across the state. SNAP-Ed serves nearly **3 million North Carolinians** with limited incomes, reaching people where they **eat, learn, live, play, shop, and work**.

## NC Impact

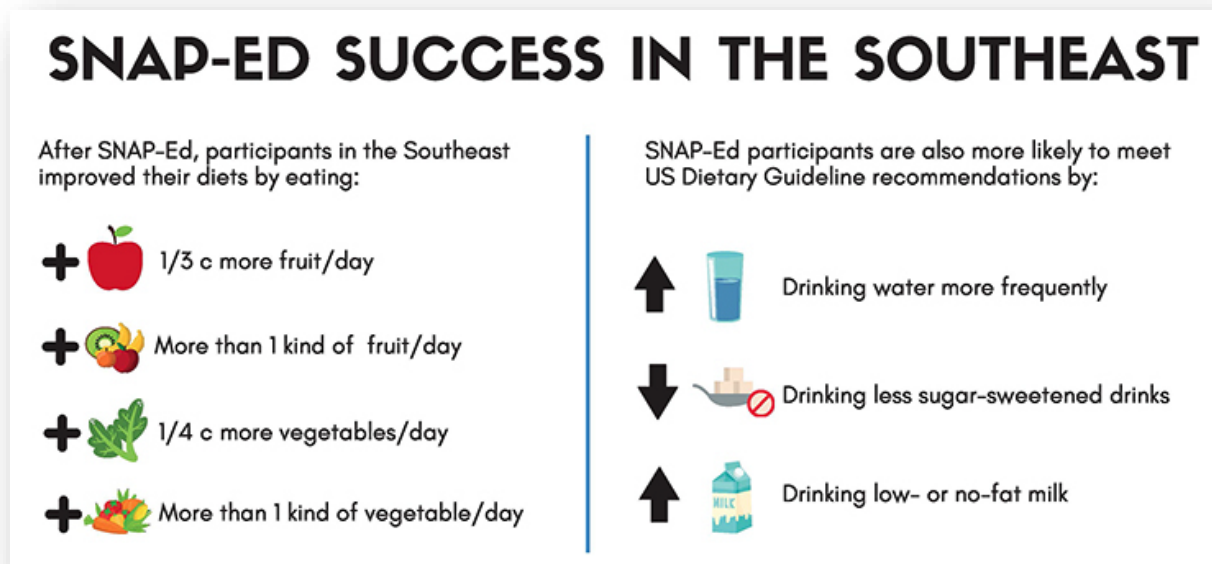
In FFY 2023, **2,428 NC residents participated in education classes**, with significant impacts:

- **Children** drank more water, meeting dietary guidelines.
- **Children** drank fewer sugar-sweetened beverages
- **Adults and seniors** ate more fruits and vegetables

- **Adults and seniors** cut back on sugary drinks.
- **Adults** chose healthy foods for their family on a budget.

In FFY 2023, NC SNAP-Ed agencies and their community partners made **588 community policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) improvements** in **48 counties** across a variety of settings where people learn, shop, play, live, eat, and work, including:

- **32 POLICY CHANGES** (e.g., policies increasing access to healthy foods and beverages and/or limiting unhealthy foods, implementation of a nutrition/physical activity-related wellness policies for childcare, schools, and workplaces)
- **280 SYSTEMS CHANGES** (e.g., offering and improving USDA summer meals, collecting or gleaning excess healthy foods for distribution to communities, opportunities for parents/students/community to access fruits and vegetables from the garden), professional development opportunities on nutrition or physical activity, incorporation of physical activity into the school day or during classroom-based instruction, etc.)
- **276 ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES** (e.g., initiation, improvement, expansion, reinvigoration, or maintenance of edible gardens, onsite garden produce for meals/snacks provided on-site, ongoing, point-of-decision prompts to make healthy eating behavior choices, the development/implementation of facilities, equipment, structures, or outdoor spaces for physical activity, access to safe walking or bicycling paths, etc.). Of these, **88% focused on nutrition, 11% on physical activity, and 1% on both.**



Reference: North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child and Family Wellbeing. (2023). FFY 2023 North Carolina SNAP-Ed report. <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/>

## The Negative Impacts of Federal Funding Freezes

The recently proposed funding cuts will have a **serious impact** on **SNAP and SNAP-Ed programs** across the states, limiting their ability to serve communities that rely on nutrition education and resources. Here are a few examples of how funding cuts will negatively affect SNAP-Ed:

**[1] Fewer Programs & Reduced Reach** – With funding stalled, states may have to **cut back on nutrition classes, workshops, and outreach efforts**, meaning fewer people—especially in underserved communities—will have access to nutrition and physical activity education and policy change supports.

**[2] Staffing & Resources at Risk** – Many SNAP-Ed programs rely on **trained educators, community partnerships, and educational materials** to make an impact. A funding cut could mean **layoffs, hiring freezes, or fewer resources for schools, food pantries, and community centers**.

**[3] Halted Policy & Community Improvements** – SNAP-Ed isn't just about education; it also **supports healthier school meals, food access initiatives, and safe places for physical activity**. Without funding, many **policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes** that improve community health may be delayed or abandoned.

**[4] Increased Food Insecurity & Health Disparities** – By cutting back on programs that teach **budget-friendly meal planning, cooking skills, and food access strategies**, families may struggle even more to afford and prepare healthy meals, leading to **worse health outcomes and higher long-term healthcare costs**.

Without urgent action, these cuts could **reverse progress in nutrition security and public health**. Advocates and policymakers must work to **restore funding** to keep SNAP-Ed strong and effective!



**The Food, Fitness, and Opportunity Research Collaborative, FFORC (pronounced 'fork')**, is a research team housed at the Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention at The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and led by Dr. Molly De Marco. At FFORC, we conduct research and evaluation to build equitable access to healthy foods and opportunities to be physically active. We work to employ participatory community engagement strategies in all our work.

**Contact us at:** [fforcteam@unc.edu](mailto:fforcteam@unc.edu)

---

*This material was funded by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - SNAP.  
UNC Chapel Hill provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.*

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.