

# Kaiser Permanente Colorado: Decreasing Food Insecurity Initiative

## Ten percent of Colorado families struggle with not having food on a consistent basis.

From 2016 to 2018, Kaiser Permanente Colorado (KPCO) provided \$1 million in grants to 13 Colorado, nonprofit organizations to decrease food insecurity, defined as lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. While food assistance is available in Colorado, the state ranks 45th out of 50 in the country in enrolling eligible families in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and 43rd out of 50 (according to 2018 data) in Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) participation.

Of the 13 grantees, 10 worked to increase enrollment in SNAP and 3 worked to increase participation in SFSP. The impact of this initiative was evaluated by the Partners in Evaluation and Research Center (PiER) housed at KPCO's Institute for Health Research.

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### Three key initiative impacts:

**1. All 10 SNAP grantees established new food insecurity screening and enrollment processes.** Grantees began providing SNAP application assistance, and conservatively enrolled about 700 families representing about 1,600 adults and children in Colorado during the two-year grant time frame.

**2. Grantees increased participation in the SFSP.** By the end of summer 2017, the 3 SFSP grantees provided almost 93,000 summer meals and expanded the number of sites providing nutritious food for low-income children from 14 to 30.

**3. Grantees were surveyed during the initiative to assess their capacity to work on food insecurity issues. Results indicated that grantees:**

- Added food access goals to their organizations' goals
- Increased staff knowledge about food access issues
- Strengthened engagement in the larger food insecurity/hunger community field
- Increased their organizations' leadership in food insecurity/hunger issues
- Improved data systems and infrastructure to support valid screening for food insecurity

## Executive Summary

### Grantees focused on increasing SNAP enrollment:

- Mountain Resource Center (Denver/Boulder)
- Northern Colorado Food Cluster (Northern Colorado)
- SET Family Clinics (Southern Colorado)
- TESSA (Southern Colorado)
- TriLakes Cares (Southern Colorado)
- Children's Hospital Colorado (Denver/Boulder)
- Doctors Care (Denver/Boulder)
- GoFarm (Denver/Boulder)
- Metro Caring (Denver/Boulder)
- Re:Vision (Denver/Boulder)

### Grantees focused on increasing participation in SFSP:

- Cultivando (Denver/Boulder)
- Eagle River Youth Coalition - InteGreat! (Mountain Colorado)
- Friends of Longmont Youth (Denver/Boulder)

*"We now have a bigger 'food tribe' in Colorado... a group of organizations who are tackling hunger in new ways."*

- KPCO Grantee

**Four major successes in implementation:****1. Grantees established consistent, valid, and sustainable processes to screen for food insecurity.**

While each of the organizations established different processes for screening, all SNAP grantees created new work practices to ensure use of validated screening questions. Several grantees added these questions to their intake forms, and other grantees screened individuals in their homes and community settings. Grantees established sustainable processes to continue this work after the grant funding ended.

**2. Grantees reached out to the families who were most likely to need food resources.**

About 35% of families screened were found to be food insecure, compared with the Colorado average of 10%. Thus, grantees appeared to be targeting efforts to populations that were the most in need of food resources.

**3. Grantees established and enhanced critical partnerships with county offices and other nonprofits working in food assistance.**

Grantees worked closely with Care and Share Food Bank for Southern Colorado, Hunger Free Colorado, the Colorado Department of Education's Office of School Nutrition, and the Program Eligibility and Application Kit (PEAK) Outreach Team. They established new referral processes and data-sharing agreements to serve families in the best manner.

**4. Grantees worked to establish or enhance trusted relationships with patients and clients.**

SNAP grantees helped families overcome several barriers to accessing food, including reducing the stigma some individuals felt about accepting help. Building a meaningful relationship with families was critical to the success of SNAP enrollment.

*15,266 Colorado families were screened for food insecurity using validated questions (a best practice).*

*"I was able to go with a client to help her apply for SNAP... and walk through the whole process with her; it is more than one-on-one help, we helped lessen the stigma; that was the critical part."*

- KPCO Grantee

*"Before we got the grant, we were interacting with a very different set of people. By necessity, we had to create a coalition of organizations that allowed us to tap into their expertise... about how to address hunger."*

- KPCO Grantee