



**Colorado Perspectives on the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health
Findings from the Colorado Bilingual Listening Session
July 2022**

Background:

In May 2022, the White House announced that they would host a [White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health](#) in September 2022. To inform this effort, the White House asked for ideas as they develop a roadmap to “End hunger and increase healthy eating and physical activity by 2030, so that fewer Americans experience diet-related diseases like diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.” To ensure Colorado community members’ voices were heard in this process, [Hunger Free Colorado](#) partnered with [Food in Communities](#) and the [Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council \(SFPC\)](#) to collect feedback by hosting a bilingual virtual listening session on July 6th, 2022 and by accepting written feedback for those that were unable to attend through an online form.

Engagement Methods:

The Listening session and written feedback form followed the format from the [toolkit](#) that the White House provided, meaning participants were asked guiding questions to inform the pillars that define the scope of the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. However, the session was focused specifically on hunger and nutrition, so the planning committee decided to omit the pillar on supporting physical activity (pillar 4).

The listening session was 90 minutes and had over 70 participants. During our time together, we provided a basic overview of the White House Conference, the five pillars, and then spent the majority of the time in one of six breakout rooms focused on conference pillars:

- Pillar 1: Improve food access and affordability (two groups in English and one in Spanish)
- Pillar 2: Integrate nutrition and health
- Pillar 3: Empower all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices
- Pillar 5: Enhance nutrition and food security research

Each community member who participated in a listening session was compensated for their time and given the opportunity to remain engaged in this process in the future.

For those that were unable to join the listening session, they had the opportunity to provide written feedback via a Google form that used the same guiding questions provided to listening session participants to inform the pillars. We received 22 responses. 11 respondents identified as community members and 11 represented organizations. Respondents were interested residents, participants in food assistance programs, farmers, food systems advocates and staff or volunteers at nonprofits.

Who did we speak with?

According to survey responses of listening session participants:

- Approximately two thirds of the participants identified as community members while the remaining third represented organizations.
- Participants included farmers and ranchers, participants in food assistance programs, food systems advocates, researchers, interested residents, government agency partners, and staff and volunteers for nonprofits.

- 4% identified as asian, 13% as black/african american, 39% as hispanic/latinx, and 49% as white.
- 67% of listening session participants reported they were female, 31% male, and 3% reported they were nonbinary or preferred not to answer.
- 2% of participants were age 20 or younger, 27% were age 21-30, 37% were age 31-40, 15% were age 41-50, 10% were age 51-60, and 7% were age 60+.

While most listening session participants and form respondents lived in the Denver and Boulder Metro area consisting of Arapahoe, Adams, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas and Jefferson counties, we also had representation from Baca, Cheyenne, Fremont, Kiowa, Larimer, Mesa, Prowers, Pueblo, Summit, and Weld counties.

What did we learn?

We consistently heard throughout all the breakout sessions that there is a lack of opportunity for those with lived/living experience to drive systems and policy. Too many are shut out of decision making conversations that intimately impact their own lives and this has harmful impacts for both those community members and the efficacy of the policies and programs made without them. Those with experience ought to be at the table and in leadership roles. To put this into action, conference organizers and all levels of government should strive to provide language access, incorporate diverse community knowledge, and create platforms for community members with lived and living experience to drive decision making and change. Additionally, funders, including the federal government, should fund the work it takes to identify community-driven solutions, as well as carry them out.

Across all listening session breakout rooms, we heard the following cross-cutting themes repeatedly:

- **Poverty and systemic racism** as root causes of hunger
- **Inflation** is hurting low income households hardest and wages and assistance programs are not keeping up
- Strong desire for investments to support **local food systems**
- **Food deserts/food apartheid areas and a lack of retailers in rural areas** exacerbate transportation and affordability challenges that already limit access to healthy, culturally relevant food options for low income community members
- Need for **expanded food assistance eligibility and benefit levels**

These themes crosscut multiple pillars as they relate to the drivers, or root causes, of the issues outlined in the conference pillars. Poor nutrition is driven by hunger which is driven by poverty which is exacerbated by systemic racism. Other themes that were common across breakout discussions give a clear indication that the mismatch between prices and cost of living is top of mind for Coloradans, that there is a desire for investments to be made locally to address challenges of hunger and nutrition, that too many communities lack access to food outlets with affordable, nutritious, culturally relevant options, and that food assistance programs are vital but fall short of meeting needs.

Addressing these underlying food access challenges is foundational to improving nutrition and health outcomes. Participants expressed hope that this conference will drive meaningful action to address the intersectional systems that create inequitable access to our most fundamental need: nutritious food.

The remainder of this report details the specific feedback on barriers and recommended actions identified by participants and respondents for each pillar.

Pillar 1: Improve food access and affordability

End hunger by making it easier for everyone — including urban, suburban, rural, and Tribal communities — to access and afford food. For example, expand eligibility for and increase participation in food assistance programs and improve transportation to places where food is available.

Description	Recommended Action	In the words of participants...
<p>Poverty drives hunger. At the root of hunger is the lack of access to the reliable income needed to support basic needs. This is due to a wide range of interconnected factors including, but not limited to, systemic racism, limited affordable childcare, low wages, insecure jobs, high housing costs, lack of support for those unable to work due to age, illness or other factors.</p>	<p>Permanently expand proven anti-poverty interventions, including a fully refundable Child Tax Credit (CTC).</p> <p>Create more equitable tax systems so that the wealthiest and corporations pay their fair share and lower income earners are not overburdened.</p> <p>Invest in quality, affordable childcare options.</p> <p>Raise the minimum wage so workers earn a living wage.</p> <p>Expand pilots for universal basic income.</p> <p>Increase affordable housing options and strengthen rental assistance programs.</p> <p>Support economic stability by expanding pathways to citizenship.</p>	<p><i>"It's not just food, it's never just food. It's housing, it's transportation, it's medicine... people aren't going hungry because of lack of food. People aren't not earning enough money because there's not enough money. So we need to ask why our CEOs and one-percenters are earning an outsized, disproportionate amount of money compared to the rest of the population."</i></p>
<p>Distance to local food retailers/food deserts. Residents of areas with limited access to food outlets offering low-cost healthy options struggle to access adequate nutritious food due to cost, distance, and lack of viable transportation options. Stores within walking distance increase access for individuals without reliable transportation, older adults and others with mobility issues. Rural towns with few food outlet options also struggle with exacerbated food access issues.</p>	<p>Encourage and incentivize full-scale grocery stores and sites with nutritious affordable food to operate in areas with limited access (sometimes called food deserts or food apartheid areas).</p> <p>Ensure that stores in rural areas and limited access areas accept SNAP, WIC and Double Up Food Bucks.</p> <p>Better connect local agriculture and land access initiatives to low food access areas to help meet needs.</p> <p>Offer free transportation services to food sources and provide federal transportation funding for ways to connect people to and from food access destinations such as grocery stores,</p>	<p><i>"In the area where we live...it has more to do with rural areas where everything costs more to get there and everything goes up. So, for us, it is that there are not enough little markets to compete with prices. Everything is rural and everything is expensive."</i></p> <p><i>"Thank God I have a car and I can move, but there are many people that live around the Walmart [that closed] who don't have a car. They would just cross the street and there they had the store nearby or they are older adults who can't be moving so far. That hurt them so much that they closed that store."</i></p> <p><i>"I've seen them build new apartment complexes and the only store they've</i></p>

	<p>schools, recreation centers, libraries, and food pantries.</p> <p>Offer land for farms and garden plots to grow food for those in need in communities.</p> <p>Subsidize Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) fruit and vegetable boxes delivered to low income community members to support nutrition security and local agriculture.</p>	<p><i>offered to bring to my neighborhood was a 7-Eleven. Tell me when has 7-Eleven ever offered nutritious food? Tell me when 7-Eleven is going to be good for a food desert community?"</i></p> <p><i>"I also live in a food desert and the closest grocery store is about a 15 minute drive. Lack of transportation won't allow people to go get nutritious food, so the fastest most convenient option is to go to a 7-Eleven or a fast food chain."</i></p>
<p>Inflation (increase in both gas and food prices). Rapid increases in food and gas prices have put a strain on households with some stating they had to choose between one or the other. In addition, fresh fruits and vegetables are typically preferred, but the cost of produce has posed a challenge for many families. Food costs are rising faster than wages and we are seeing an increase in food insecurity among middle-class Coloradans.</p>	<p>Federal supply/demand interventions.</p> <p>Ensure that market food baskets used to set benefit levels reflect the actual cost of goods in a given region.</p> <p>Create a more dynamic and flexible model to ensure that SNAP and WIC benefits levels truly keep up with inflation.</p> <p>Stabilize fuel costs, as this will also help reduce the input costs for farmers and ranchers and will lower food prices.</p>	<p><i>"It would be great if there was an increase in food benefits because prices are very high and it is not enough to make ends meet with the money they give for the same prices."</i></p> <p><i>"In some places, they pay very little. I would like that when they go up [rent prices, food], that salaries go up."</i></p> <p><i>"I wish they would lower the price of gasoline. Right now, I have to drive farther to pick up food and there are times I try to avoid going to the store every so often precisely to avoid spending on gasoline."</i></p> <p><i>"What individuals budgeted in the past for groceries isn't going as far nowadays."</i></p>
<p>Lack of support for local farmers and food systems. Participants stated that they prefer local, organic, and fresh produce and desire a connection with their local land and growers. However, there is a lack of support for local farms and farmers and the food system heavily favors big box stores and commodity agriculture.</p>	<p>Increased funding to support connections between local agriculture and food access organizations.</p> <p>Institute federal subsidies for fruits and vegetables so growers can afford to grow these nutritious foods and sell them in their local communities at an affordable price while paying their workers well.</p> <p>Invest in local agriculture that moves away from harmful practices like monocropping and heavy pesticide use which harm biodiversity and instead move toward regenerative soil practices, organics and biodynamics, crop</p>	<p><i>"If we are going to subsidize farmers, we need to subsidize food that people eat, not just corn and soy. Prioritizing small and mid-size farmers and producers in the future is going to be important. We need more robust and protected supply chains and decentralized food systems to not just focus on the large producers."</i></p> <p><i>"I would like our government to support small family local farmers, ranchers and producers and small businesses as much as they do for Big Ag, corporations and their lobbyists."</i></p>

<p>Need to expand nutrition assistance programs. Federal programs such as SNAP, WIC, and Double Up Food Bucks provide significant support for families, but their impact and accessibility are limited by burdensome eligibility requirements and restrictive qualifications. Additionally, many households are struggling to make ends meet but make just too much to qualify for assistance. Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) was mentioned frequently as a vital benefit to Colorado families, but participants would like to see it expanded to be permanent and more accessible.</p>	<p>rotations, silvopasture, and agroforestry.</p> <p>Simplify and streamline program eligibility to be more transparent, understandable, and approachable.</p> <p>Expand SNAP eligibility to excluded populations that disproportionately experience hunger, including immigrants and college students.</p> <p>Eliminate the arbitrary three month time limit in SNAP that takes food away from those struggling to find work and that exacerbates the effects of systemic racism in our labor market.</p> <p>Expand Double Up Food Bucks to operate in more retailers that more shoppers have regular access to.</p> <p>Increase the income eligibility threshold for SNAP and WIC.</p> <p>Build on the success of P-EBT to create a permanent Summer EBT program to address the child nutrition gap experienced during school breaks and summer months. Ensure the program uses streamlined data systems to smoothly connect households to the benefits they are eligible for without requiring additional applications and barriers to access.</p>	<p><i>“The truth is that these are very difficult times... My idea is to take advantage of the opportunities offered by federal programs to provide information to all families if they can benefit from programs that already exist to support these families in these times... Families are going to have to make difficult decisions... offer clear information in the language that one can transmit in the community so families have the correct information and can choose which program or benefit they can access.”</i></p>
<p>Older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities face additional barriers to access. The older adult and disabled populations face access challenges that are unique. They also have distinct nutritional needs. For example, older adults may have less comfort managing benefits through online application systems and people with disabilities may need more online and delivery shopping options to fully utilize benefits they are eligible for. Additionally, this</p>	<p>Take targeted action to increase SNAP accessibility, online purchasing, and delivery options, prioritizing the most vulnerable populations.</p> <p>Increase SNAP benefit levels to ensure that participants can afford an adequate nutritious diet by at least adopting the Low Cost Meal Plan, for example, instead of the Thrifty Meal Plan which makes unrealistic assumptions about preparation time and facilities, among other limitations.</p> <p>Make addressing hunger and</p>	<p><i>“The definition of food desert, especially for someone with limited mobility, should shift. If you have limited mobility or limited cognition but you’re still able to live independently, you aren’t able to go as far... So, a food desert for you is much smaller.”</i></p>

<p>population sometimes qualifies for very low monthly benefit amounts (when emergency allotments are not in effect) despite their increased barriers to accessing nutritional food. Many veterans also face high rates of hunger and homelessness and lack adequate support.</p>	<p>homelessness among veterans a top priority of the Veterans Administration.</p>	
<p>Administrative and funding barriers to partnerships. There is a need for more engagement between government agencies, nonprofits and community organizations with already developed community ties. However, many government funding opportunities (for example, SNAP outreach and nutrition incentive funds) require partners to provide matching funds, to get paid through reimbursement and have challenging reporting and application requirements. This limits partnerships, especially for groups and regions with fewer resources. Additionally, the limitations on only allowing merit staff to complete many tasks in SNAP creates an environment ripe for processing delays, lack of personal support for applicants, and high churn rates due to limited eligibility worker capacity in times of high need. These restrictions can limit creativity for the government and nonprofit sector to partner to address challenges.</p>	<p>A more equitable approach would enable partnerships to be funded without matching requirements, or at least with less stringent matching requirements. This would ensure that grassroots groups that are often best at connecting with communities that are hard to reach and facing underinvestment could participate in programs like SNAP outreach.</p> <p>Ensure that there are funding options that pay partners through forms other than reimbursement. The requirement to provide funds up front makes partnership impossible for many groups.</p> <p>Investigate and enable flexibility to involve more non-merit staff in activities that could ease benefit access and application process for clients while still protecting client rights and program efficiency.</p> <p>Invest more at the local level to reach more residents.</p> <p>Increase food rescue operations and expand the Emerson Good Samaritan Act through the Food Donation Improvement Act to help organizations that function based on donated food.</p> <p>Reduce data requirements for organizations that partner with the government to provide food to community members (for example TEFAP) because asking participants invasive questions is a barrier to access and is burdensome.</p>	<p><i>“Proof of need, proof of residency, and other similar requirements to accessing services and government funds are major barriers to many at-risk populations, especially those who may already feel stigma around seeking services.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, [we] shouldn't have to ask lots of questions of potential participants and have to hand that information over to the government. For lots of people, that is a barrier for services.”</i></p> <p><i>“Reporting and access to funds for nonprofits to work with government entities is onerous.”</i></p> <p><i>“Grant opportunities need fewer barriers for all. Matching funds need to go away! It will allow so many more organizations to apply. And simplified reporting and applications!”</i></p>

<p>The SNAP application process is inaccessible and confusing. SNAP eligibility rules and decisions are hard to understand. The process is particularly intimidating for older adults and those who do not speak English as their first language. In many cases, technology access is required to smoothly apply for and manage benefits, as well as a reliable mailing address and phone number, all of which many applicants do not have access to, especially if they are houseless. To navigate SNAP properly, you must interface with several different websites/apps and offices and successfully complete several steps including a long application, an often redundant interview with a caseworker, and submission of verification documents.</p>	<p>Modernize SNAP application systems to make them more user-friendly and accessible.</p> <p>Eliminate the requirement to complete an interview when it is unnecessary to determine eligibility.</p> <p>Simplify benefit eligibility rules to enable a more streamlined application with fewer verification requirements and more transparency.</p>	<p><i>“If you are worried about where your next meal is going to come from or if your EBT card will last through the month, you can’t focus on anything else that would move you out of poverty or the situation you are in. So, we need to create a system that provides long-term food stability so people can get what it takes to feed themselves and their families.”</i></p>
<p>Inadequacy of SNAP benefit levels. When maximum allotment expires in Colorado, SNAP will offer households on the verge of not qualifying as little as \$20/month. These are households with lower deductions and higher income, however, they are still struggling to meet their basic needs. Sometimes these individuals/households report feeling that the effort to apply is not worth the minimal benefit they might qualify for and so, have been completely deterred from seeking benefits. Benefits are currently boosted through Emergency Allotments due to the pandemic. This has been a huge help to households but there is a looming hunger cliff when the pandemic emergency comes to a close and those additional benefits are reduced down again.</p>	<p>Maintain the higher SNAP benefit levels enabled through Emergency Allotments long-term.</p> <p>Significantly increase SNAP benefit levels to better meet the nutritional needs of participants and recognize the true cost of healthy food today.</p> <p>Eliminate deductions entirely and ensure all get high enough benefit levels, or make sure that deductions truly account for the real income and expenses of individuals.</p>	<p><i>“As a person with many disabilities, including blindness, I find SNAP doesn’t always adequately fit a nutritional budget.”</i></p> <p><i>“SNAP needs to keep up with costs. It’s not always worth applying for the dollars received.”</i></p>
<p>Limitations to shopping with</p>	<p>Allow SNAP to be used to purchase hot</p>	<p><i>“To be able to use SNAP benefits to buy a</i></p>

<p>SNAP. SNAP does not allow you to pay for delivery fees and can only be used online with some retailers. Additionally, it can only be used on cold foods. This is particularly limiting for participants with limited mobility and limited access to places they can prepare food.</p>	<p>and prepared foods, for example, rotisserie chickens.</p> <p>Expand the restaurant meals programs so more SNAP households can access prepared meals, especially those experiencing homelessness and those with disabilities.</p> <p>Expand online retailers that accept SNAP and ensure that delivery systems are feasible to use for SNAP customers.</p>	<p><i>rotisserie chicken, for delivery fees, or at a local non-profit that delivers—all of those are ways to fill in those gaps.”</i></p>
<p>Schools are important food and nutrition access points. Many children rely on the meals they receive at school, however, the school meal application can be a barrier due to the administrative burden for families and schools as well as concerns about data use and privacy. Additionally, the free and reduced price tiers contribute to children experiencing stigma at school and leave too many families out that still need food assistance. At the higher education level, incredibly high rates of students face hunger, which is a barrier to their successful degree completion and long-term health and economic potential.</p>	<p>Strengthen the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to enable more schools and districts to serve more nutritious meals to students at no cost to families, including by creating a statewide option.</p> <p>Create a healthy school meals for all students program that would ensure healthy breakfasts and lunches for students in school and daycare at no cost to families to support their learning, development, and nutrition.</p> <p>Invest in schools as distribution hubs for food programs.</p> <p>Ensure college campuses have food access programs to address hunger like food pantries and basic needs centers.</p> <p>Expand SNAP eligibility to low income college students (EATS Act).</p>	<p><i>“Invest in schools as a distribution hub for food. Provide staff, equipment (refrigeration and freezers), and storage space.”</i></p>

Pillar 2: Integrate nutrition and health
Prioritize the role of nutrition and food security in overall health, including disease prevention and management, and ensuring that our healthcare system addresses the nutrition needs of all people.

Description	Recommended Action	Comments from participants
<p>Lack of availability of nutrition security and culturally relevant foods. To integrate nutrition and food security with health outcomes, people should have equitable access to</p>	<p>Prioritize fresh fruits and vegetables in federal food assistance programs.</p> <p>Provide sustained funding that prioritizes nutrition security through federal nutrition programs.</p>	<p><i>“WIC has a specific list of food items a recipient can purchase from. We have some items we wish were there and not there. WIC has increased fruit and veggie allowance which was great but can continue to do more.”</i></p>

<p>local, regional, nutritious (fresh fruits and vegetables), and culturally relevant food.</p>	<p>Create sustainable food system programs and policies that support the production, aggregation, transportation, and distribution of food.</p> <p>Incentivize regenerative agriculture for nutritious and resilient crops to provide for food systems that have become overly processed, like our school and hospital cafeterias. Schools and hospitals should have the most nutritious foods for growing brains and healing bodies, but our current model can make it some of the most processed food in our communities.</p> <p>Reduce restrictions on access and availability for WIC and SNAP programs to increase program participation.</p> <p>Establish best practices and provide education to agricultural businesses to implement sustainable farming practices. Government and publicly-funded institutions, from schools to hospitals to prisons, should have purchasing policies that require food served at these institutions to come from sustainable agriculture. The government should lead by example and invest in sustainable agriculture and nutrient-dense food.</p>	<p><i>“Families don’t have to go to pantry programs or stores to get veggies. Help them get land to get their veggies and support farmers. It’s a challenge but growing interest. Folks ask ‘What can I grow and give to my kids, so they can develop the taste for fresh fruits and veggies.’”</i></p> <p><i>“Food that is given out is either expired or processed (unhealthy), and sometimes both.”</i></p>
<p>Education, training, and support through SNAP and WIC. Families often lack the resources or time to prepare healthy meals. This is exacerbated by the high cost of living, low minimum wage, and having to hold down multiple jobs. This affects access to fresh fruits and vegetables as it takes time and skill to prepare these foods.</p>	<p>Community-centered focus on SNAP and WIC programs to allow for education, training, and support for families around nutrition education and meal preparation.</p> <p>Food providers need more education in cultural nutrition to be able to provide a greater diversity in products.</p> <p>Provide menus in multiple languages with what is available at food distribution sites so recipients can learn ways to prepare it. Provide cooking classes in multiple languages so recipients can learn ways to prepare new foods.</p>	<p><i>“SNAP and WIC programs are available, however, recipients are either not aware of or taking advantage of SNAP educational opportunities.”</i></p> <p><i>“If they don’t know what to do with produce, it doesn’t get taken.”</i></p> <p><i>“WIC has a program for education and access to resources for communities, like breastfeeding training and support. Expanding eligibility and WIC as an education program could be universal for educating and supporting child development and nutrition in the first years of life.”</i></p>

<p>Tie nutrition and public health into the healthcare system. Nutrition needs to be better integrated into healthcare settings and systems.</p>	<p>The training in medical schools and approach of the healthcare system should be community-oriented and focus on prevention strategies that lead to better health outcomes.</p> <p>Prioritize affordable healthcare.</p> <p>Design policy to better integrate nutrition and public health in the healthcare system to address the social determinants of health.</p>	<p><i>“Nutrition and Public Health needs to be integrated in healthcare. Medical schools and Healthcare systems don’t focus a lot on nutrition, so med providers aren’t well [equipped] and aren’t integrated to provide meaningful nutrition care to patients in a healthcare setting.”</i></p> <p><i>“Healthcare focuses on sickness rather than prevention. Incentivize the healthcare community to provide nutritional support. Healthcare has a lot of money.”</i></p> <p><i>“Accessing affordable healthcare is extremely difficult and the EBNE population tends to feel like they cannot afford monthly insurance rates, even with discounts. ER visits and high costs are burdening many community members.”</i></p>
<p>Collaboration across different agencies. As multiple agencies touch aspects of food, they should work collectively to address access to healthy food.</p>	<p>Support collaboration between agencies that work in aspects of food access and healthcare institutions.</p> <p>Create a task force of people with lived experience with hunger that provides recommended actions to address nutrition security across government.</p> <p>Support for large collaborative efforts such as coalitions working to address policy, systems and environments.</p> <p>Government should work with those already leading this work and follow their expertise.</p>	<p><i>“Multiple federal agencies work on food. How are they working better together in the collective addressing of food, access, and health of food? There should be a federal vision that gets everyone to work collectively.”</i></p> <p><i>“Many of the efforts by collective impact agencies have great influence in the community. Backbone agencies do great networking and passing info and should share accountability. Here in Colorado, we have early childhood councils that serve as the backbone for initiatives for schools, churches, libraries, community orgs, etc. and they find common ground which leads to great influence.”</i></p> <p><i>“Our nonprofit works with local farmers markets, growers, and farm gleaning organizations to provide free, healthy, nutrient-dense food to low-income, homeless, and hungry populations in our community. If we can do it, the government can and should, too.”</i></p>
<p>Inflation and cost of food is rising. The cost of food is high, which means an increased cost of fresh fruits</p>	<p>The White House should prioritize access to fresh fruits and vegetables but also understand the root causes of hunger like racist policies, housing,</p>	<p><i>“Cost of food is rising. Some families have only \$100/month for fresh fruit and veggies (depending on the number of kids).”</i></p>

<p>and vegetables. Healthier foods are increasingly expensive.</p>	<p>transportation, unstable markets, and climate change. When non-nutritional food is cheaper and easier to access, it exacerbates health outcomes.</p> <p>Stabilize fuel prices.</p> <p>Invest in sustainable food production models that do not harm our land while generating healthy and nutritious food.</p>	<p><i>“Access to cheap, non-nutritional food can exacerbate the disease process. Inflation and cost of food is high, [it] exacerbates the whole situation.”</i></p> <p><i>“It is hard to find fresh foods and then afford them on the average wage/salary of folks in our community.”</i></p>
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Pillar 3: Empower all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices
Foster environments that enable all people to easily make informed healthy choices, increase access to healthy food, encourage healthy workplace and school policies, and invest in public messaging and education campaigns that are culturally appropriate and resonate with specific communities.

Theme	Recommended Action	Comments from participants
<p>Center racial equity in national policy and programs. There is a lack of communal spaces within which to freely share knowledge and resources. This demands the creation of new institutions and relationships that honor the humanity and liberation of all peoples.</p>	<p>Prioritize the creation of community food commons that allow for community gardens and event spaces that are free to the community to give space to learn, relationship build, and trade ideas.</p> <p>Move to a system that values those most impacted rather than the demands of markets.</p> <p>Invite target audiences in the spaces where policy is made to ensure it fits the actual need and root cause.</p>	<p><i>“The Denver program is an example: Community fridges, where people can get food for free when needed without judgment and stigma. Denver’s pilot program also supported local artists by allowing them to showcase their art on the fridges.”</i></p>
<p>Food desserts/apartheids are becoming increasingly more common in communities of color. There are not enough quality grocery stores in the community and there are too many fast-food restaurants.</p>	<p>Address historical redlining policies, ensure city planning does not displace people by gentrification and look at zoning language to ensure it allows for what communities want coming into their neighborhoods to address food access.</p> <p>Improve existing food programs in low-income areas. If none exist, work with the community to build new connections and support emerging efforts.</p> <p>Connect programs to local farmers to improve the quality of food given to the community.</p> <p>Incentivize healthier options to move into low-income communities and have a regulation on the amounts of fast-food available.</p>	<p><i>“In the surrounding area of West Highschool in Denver, there are too many unhealthy options, pushing students to make unhealthy choices.”</i></p> <p><i>“More impoverished areas are impacted more, poor lives are worth less it seems. Connecting local farmers to programs to help the quality of such food can be a solution.”</i></p>
<p>Corporate racism.</p>	<p>Develop tools that combat corporate racism.</p>	<p><i>“We have been too focused on the</i></p>

<p>Corporations lack interest in investing in lower-income communities, communities of color and small businesses.</p>	<p>Incentivize those who are willing to work in these communities.</p> <p>Provide more capital to small businesses to allow for more credit to their customers.</p>	<p><i>food chain model.</i></p> <p><i>“Put more money and opportunity in the hands of small businesses, not big chain stores.”</i></p>
<p>Cumbersome processes in providing food assistance. For example, WIC participants are too limited to certain brands and/or items.</p>	<p>Improve and simplify application processes to access federal nutrition programs.</p> <p>Reduce the number of questions that must be asked concerning eligibility.</p> <p>Increase the inventory of stores that accept WIC and other benefits and expand the eligible brands/items that WIC participants can purchase.</p>	<p><i>“Current processes are far too cumbersome and aren’t culturally responsive.”</i></p> <p><i>“This issue was very prominent during the apex of the pandemic, when many [WIC] items were unavailable due to shortages.”</i></p> <p><i>“Questions like if they are single, residency/immigration status, address, makes it humiliating for participants.”</i></p>
<p>Land access is difficult to maintain due to cost.</p>	<p>Grant money to subsidize local farmers to help grow food for local nonprofits.</p> <p>Help people grow their own food in order to work towards food sovereignty.</p> <p>Increase education around growing food among community members.</p>	<p><i>“Westwood Co-op’s community garden in Denver is an example of what can help. It’s a Community Garden that sells food at discounted prices.”</i></p>
<p>Ongoing inflation affects lower income individuals disproportionately.</p>	<p>Increase wages or offer universal basic income so people can have the autonomy of buying the food they want and/or revise income qualifications to federal nutrition programs to reflect inflation.</p> <p>Allow in-store credit for customers.</p> <p>Have a plan for when there is a shortage of food.</p>	<p><i>“Cost of living and for food has gone up, but income and benefit amounts stay the same more or less.”</i></p> <p><i>“Recent formula shortages provide a need for more breastmilk sharing programs to help those without.”</i></p>
<p>Lack of food access in rural communities.</p>	<p>Expand, strengthen, and allow more flexibility and innovation within federal nutrition programs like the Summer Food Service Program and WIC to better serve rural areas.</p> <p>Prioritize access to food in rural areas and ensure that existing stores accept SNAP and WIC.</p>	<p><i>“[There is] a major lack of stores in rural areas where there are far less stores than Metro areas.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not being able to use WIC benefits online is a big barrier, as it can be convenient for families to access food as transportation is a barrier, accentuated during COVID.”</i></p>

<p>Lack of funding for local community-led projects/programs that encourage local procurement.</p>	<p>Work towards food sovereignty to ensure that people have access to culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and a right to define their own food and agriculture systems.</p> <p>Increase funding for local projects or nonprofits that are already doing this work.</p> <p>Develop a program that connects growers with extra produce with food pantries through cities or counties.</p>	
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Pillar 5: Enhance nutrition and food security research
Improve nutrition metrics, data collection, and research to inform nutrition and food security policy, particularly on issues of equity, access, and disparities.

Description	Recommended Action
<p>Conference framing misses an opportunity to directly address the underlying root causes of hunger, health, and nutrition challenges in our country. By focusing pillars on the challenges of hunger, nutrition, and health, the conference orients toward solving symptoms rather than root causes. This means the research done in community (through listening sessions like these) is framed to identify solutions to challenges that are symptomatic rather than at the root of systemic injustices.</p>	<p>Use this conference to model participatory, action-oriented research that truly leads to implemented, impactful changes for the communities that have contributed.</p> <p>Continually ask community members to identify the root causes of these challenges and their solutions to those root causes.</p> <p>Create a structure of accountability to ensure learnings lead to justice-oriented action for communities.</p>
<p>Existing research is more useful to academics than to practitioners. Existing food security and nutrition research is helpful to academics/scientists that are modeling hypotheses related to food consumption/disease outcomes and sociodemographics/food consumption. These data sets are not useful to those on the ground doing the work (community based orgs, pantries, etc.).</p>	<p>Participants want to see opportunities to involve community-based organizations in research design, data collection, and analysis.</p> <p>Focus and fund participatory action research (an approach that emphasizes participation and action by members of communities affected by that research).</p> <p>Fund qualified researchers with food systems expertise.</p> <p>Center anti-racism in research and invest in research that examines the root causes of these issues because lack of nutrition and food insecurity are symptoms of other problems.</p> <p>Ask those working on the ground what data they need and involve them in the process of gathering that data.</p>
<p>Approach to research design limits findings. The way that research studies are designed and the types of</p>	<p>Broaden the types of questions that are asked and to whom. This begins with building trust and building relationships so that</p>

<p>questions that are asked restrict the type of data that is collected and therefore also restrict findings/conclusions of research studies.</p>	<p>more diverse communities can see a role for themselves in the research and a benefit for themselves/their community by participating in research in this field.</p> <p>Host workshops or community forums to inform the target audience about research and how to get involved.</p> <p>Broaden research topics and organizations and communities involved in or informing research in this field.</p>
<p>The “Food Desert” definition widely used in research is too limited. The USDA ERS Food Access Research Atlas is cited by many governmental and nonprofit entities to describe where there is a lack of access to grocery retail and is a resource that many people use to designate areas as “food deserts.” The model is limited in describing the circumstances in any specific community because it is based on only two main variables (distance to store and access to a vehicle).</p>	<p>Explore how the analysis of food deserts could be revised to include more variables and ensure reliability of the data.</p> <p>Explore how community-based organizations, municipal planners, etc. could inform the developers of the Food Access Research Atlas about variables of interest.</p>

Final Thoughts

The density of creative ideas shared by Coloradans during this 90 minute session illustrates that solutions exist within communities and community members are eager to share their expertise. It is crucial that in this next stage of conference planning, those experts and voices are in roles of leadership, planning, and implementation. We are hopeful that with meaningful involvement from community experts, this conference can drive outcomes that address the challenges described by Colorado community members and make strides toward implementing transformative solutions.

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Special thank you to the following community consultants and organizations for sharing their expertise, time, and feedback to help inform the the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health:

Community consultants: Ademola Justin, Allie Hoffman, Amy Ramos, Andrea Loudd, Benu Amun-Ra, David Ricker, Elizabeth Ava, Enrique Rodriguez, Harry Sean, Hunter Jackson, Jennifer Roussel, Kimberly Marshall, Liam Houston, Marisa Beltran, Mary Kenyon, Michael Thomas, Monserrat Mendoza, Pamela Whitney, Sammy Mayden, Scott Peterson, Steve Kullberg, Tatiana Dykes, Theresa Alexander, Tommy Adams, and Vanessa Bernal.

Organizations: About F.A.C.E. Collaborative Management Program, Denver Food Rescue, Denver Urban Gardens, Denver West Campus Food Bank, Food Bank of the Rockies, Hunger Free Colorado, Jefferson County Public Health, Jefferson County Public Health WIC, Montbello Organizing Committee, Rocky Mountain Research and Prevention Program, Safe and Abundant Nutrition Alliance (SANA), Servicios de La Raza, Southwest Food Coalition, The LoVVe Project, Valley Meals and More, VIVE WELLNESS, and We Don’t Waste.

Special thank you to listening session organizers: Anjani Moro, Caitlin Matthews, Carolina Ramirez, Dana Wood, Jordan Lamport, Laine Cidlowski, Lauren Howe, Marion Kalb, Nicholas Marquez, Sarah Sajbel, Wendy Smittick, and Willow Cozzens.