

Executive Summary

Even in a state as prosperous as Washington, childhood hunger is a problem. It does not look like hunger portrayed in the media or engrained in the minds of the vast majority of state residents. However, it is real and in need of focused attention across the state.

Almost 300,000 children in Washington live in households that struggle to put food on the table everyday due to lack of resources.¹

- African-American and Latino households are two to three times more likely than the general population to experience “food insecurity,” meaning they can’t be sure there is enough money for food.
- Families in rural areas, especially in south central Washington, are twice as likely to experience food insecurity.
- 38 percent of all students live in low-income families, qualifying them for free or reduced-price school meals.
- Food banks had more than 6 million visits by hungry households in 2005–2006.
- 15.4 percent of all Washington children (from birth to 17) are living at or below the poverty line. In some parts of the state, as many as 30 percent of all children are living in poverty.

¹The technical term for this is “food insecurity.” USDA and Census food security and hunger data released in fall 2007.

WHO WE ARE

End childhood hunger Washington is an initiative of the children’s alliance in partnership with share Our Strength. Its mission is to advance a statewide campaign to end childhood hunger through policy change, collaborative programming, strategic funding and targeted awareness building. This is done in service to our vision that every child in every corner of the state gets three nutritious meals each and every day. This can be done by living our core values of putting kids first, ensuring food security for every child, collaborating regularly, modeling anti-racist practice and acting with integrity.

WHAT WE KNOW

National discussions are happening in Congress and on the editorial pages about our broken food system. From supporting sustainable farming, to eliminating junk food in schools, to expanding access to school meals, Washington has proven itself a leader on issues that address part of the hunger problem. Yet on other issues that are tightly linked to ending hunger—like food stamp participation or summer meals for kids—Washington ranks far below other states.

Washington State currently implements many of the federal programs, tools and resources available to end childhood hunger. Beginning with the National School Lunch Program in 1946, the United States developed an array of effective anti-hunger tools to help children grow into healthy adults. Federally funded programs such as food stamps, WIC, school meals, summer meals and commodities in

food banks help families, caregivers, schools and community organizations feed children.

Participation in federal nutrition programs makes it possible to reduce hunger with relatively low expenditures of local public and private funds. The leveraging of federal funds helps Washington get an impressive return on the investment of local dollars. On the other hand, by allowing childhood hunger to continue, the price is poorer childhood health, lower academic achievement and creeping insecurity. Simply put, not addressing childhood hunger is more expensive than addressing it.

KEY FINDINGS

After surveying and interviewing key anti-hunger leaders in Washington, we reached the following conclusions about the feasibility and challenges of ending childhood hunger in our state.

1. **The vision of ending childhood hunger in Washington is achievable.**

Participants in the planning process overwhelmingly agree that ending childhood hunger in Washington is an achievable goal. They applaud the boldness of the statement and feel it can serve as a catalyst to garner engagement and support with new audiences.

2. **Maximizing participation in current programs is a key means to achieve the vision.**

Key child nutrition programs are underutilized. Many participants in the planning process agree that expanding the reach of these proven programs is a logical first step to ending hunger.

3. **Interagency collaboration is essential and cannot be left to chance.**

Many participants in the planning process

cited the lack of effective communications and coordination between and within government agencies as significant barriers to ending childhood hunger.

The absence of effective coordination between state agencies and service providers is also a significant barrier to achieving the goal. Washington's Legislature and/or Governor should establish a high-level interagency food council to promote coordinated and collaborative policy and programming changes.

4. **Leadership is essential.**

Interviews with key anti-hunger leaders affirmed that the Children's Alliance is regarded as an organization with both the political and grassroots influence needed to achieve results for kids in Washington

5. **Elected officials are the most influential decision-makers for eliminating childhood hunger.**

Participants cited the importance of engaging the Governor and legislative leaders in support of the plan to end childhood hunger in Washington. They articulated the belief that multi-year public policy campaigns, supported by coordinated coalitions of supporters, produce results.

6. **Anti-racist practice is a core value and must translate into authentic engagement, collaboration and decision-making.**

The success of the plan to end childhood hunger depends upon engaging communities across Washington, including communities of color, disenfranchised groups and historically underrepresented communities.

7. **Childhood hunger and childhood obesity are two sides of the same coin.**

Media coverage of the childhood obesity

epidemic reinforces the misperception that too much food, not too little, is the real problem. In reality, both hunger and obesity are symptoms of our broken food system. They afflict our most vulnerable populations.

8. Skepticism still exists about the prevalence of childhood hunger.

The reality of childhood hunger in Washington contradicts what most people, including the general public and media, believe it looks like. In Washington state, the prevalence of childhood hunger also contradicts its image as one of the healthiest states in the United States.

OUR PLAN

Federal programs and local initiatives work. They simply aren't reaching every child in need. To put an end to childhood hunger in Washington, we need to improve the systems in place, develop and implement effective policies and programs, and extend the reach of these programs to every child in every corner of the state. End Childhood Hunger Washington has five strategic approaches and ten goals at the core of the initiative.

All five strategic approaches to ending childhood hunger will contribute to successfully meeting the plan's goals. The strategic approaches are interconnected and interdependent.

Strategic Approaches

1. POLICY CHANGE

End Childhood Hunger Washington is focused on legislative and administrative policy changes at both the state and federal levels that will result in greater participation in and improvement

of underutilized public and private anti-hunger programs for low-income families, communities of color and other communities at high risk of hunger.

2. COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMMING

Collaborative programming is a means of identifying gaps, sharing information and expertise appropriately, and expanding the reach of successful programs.

3. STRATEGIC FUNDING AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Strategic resource development will produce plans that present a strong case to funders and leverage public funds.

4. TARGETED AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

These targeted awareness strategies would support the 10 goals outlined in this plan by identifying communications needs for specific audiences who are critical to effectively implementing the plan.

MEASURES OF PROGRESS

It is important to measure growth progressively in addition to final outcomes. The measures of progress include both qualitative and quantitative points.

Ten Goals

1. Families with low incomes efficiently receive Basic Food (food stamps) support that is sufficient to meet their needs.
2. All children eat a healthy, appealing breakfast and lunch at school.
3. Children and youth eat healthy meals in their communities throughout the summer.
4. Low-income children and families have reliable access to affordable food, especially fresh fruits and vegetables,