

Section Three: Key Findings

End Childhood Hunger Washington used a combination of methods to gather information and feedback regarding the goal of ending childhood hunger in Washington. The methods included research, data analysis, meetings, telephone interviews, an online survey and an interactive, daylong Summit to End Childhood Hunger in October 2007. The strategic plan is a response to the key findings that follow.

The vision 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. However, making that vision a reality requires strong leadership, a commitment to increased collaboration and communication, and strategies that include policy, programming, resource development and awareness. This plan addresses these areas and the overarching needs for leadership and collaboration by establishing measurable objectives in the 10 goals that will focus partners' collaborative work and leadership.

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. Planning focused particularly on expanding the reach of school breakfast, summer meal programs and food

stamps. This plan acknowledges the need to increase resources and develop the capacity in local communities to bring these programs to children at risk of going hungry. The plan includes measurable objectives designed to increase participation and to increase equity across the state.

Interagency collaboration is essential and cannot be left to chance.

Many participants in the planning process cited the lack of effective communications and high-level coordination within and among government agencies as significant barriers to ending childhood hunger. The absence of effective coordination between state agencies and service providers is also limiting. Various coordinating groups have existed over the years, including an interagency food issues coordinating council (IFIC) and a group convened in response to USDA requirements called SNAP (Statewide Nutrition Action Plan) as well as multiple coalitions or working groups. Yet none of these configurations has lasted or has the clear mission, structural support and leadership composition to respond to the full range of issues and opportunities addressed in this planning process.

This plan recommends that the Legislature and/or Governor establish a high-level interagency food council modeled on those in other states. This interagency council would bring together state agencies, advocates and service providers to support strategic, coordinated policy change, collaborative services and effective communication across programs and systems in order to end childhood hunger in Washington.

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. Most often participants affirmed that the Children's Alliance is best positioned to change public systems and bring advocates and public leaders together to create a common vision and campaign for change. This plan thus assigns the Children's Alliance the role of providing leadership in effecting policy change. Additionally, in this plan the Children's Alliance is assigned roles in promoting collaborative programming and developing the resources needed to effectively implement the plan.

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. This plan reflects that belief and draws on lessons learned from the successful recent efforts to eliminate the co-pay for some reduced-price school meals.

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. This plan includes strategies for engaging these communities and strategies for examining and responding to the impact of racism on vulnerable populations.

Childhood hunger and childhood obesity are symptoms of the same issue: our broken food system.

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 stem from our broken food system. Lack of nutritious, healthy food disproportionately affects our most vulnerable children and families. Low-income neighborhoods often lack affordable, healthy foods and limited safe opportunities for physical activity. This plan makes the connection between food policy, the built environment, poverty and racism, and other factors in order to make a real impact on both childhood hunger and childhood obesity.

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, the prevalence of childhood hunger also contradicts its image as one of the healthiest states in the United States. Many participants in the planning process see the need for a major public awareness campaign to change public opinion. This plan focuses on what is called targeted awareness, which defines specific campaigns designed for target audiences who are essential to achieving the goal.