Identifying Gaps in Data for Food Assistance Program Eligibility and Participation in Washington State
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**Background**

Almost 12% of Washingtonians experience food insecurity

Four agencies, Department of Health, Department of Social and Human Services, Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, administer 15 federally-funded food assistance programs

Programs measure participation and eligibility data, but data do not fully describe racial/ethnic and geographic disparities of participation

Data are inaccessible to community-level stakeholders, such as food banks and pantries, parent-teacher associations, and hunger relief organizations

WA state legislature passed a budget proviso requiring the four agencies to compile and report these data

**Objectives**

- Describe available eligibility and participation data for all food assistance programs with appropriate context
- Identify missing data and gaps in current data
- Recommend future uses for data

**Methods**

- Identify available eligibility and participation data on agencies’ websites
- Contact agency representatives via email to determine data unavailable online
- Summarize available and missing data in:
  1. one-page “report card” for the state
  2. report suggesting next steps

**Findings**

- All food assistance programs fall short of feeding all needy people
  - SNAP serves ~74% of eligible clients
- Most data are not disaggregated by geography, race/ethnicity, etc.
- Data collection was too tedious and unreasonable for community-level stakeholders
- Data were presented as static numbers with incomplete context

**Recommendations**

1. Engage stakeholders in data collection
2. Collect more data for public release
3. Create user-friendly databases

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Data for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) with respect to all WA residents; 74% of eligible SNAP recipients (497,022 WA residents) do not participate in the program despite eligibility