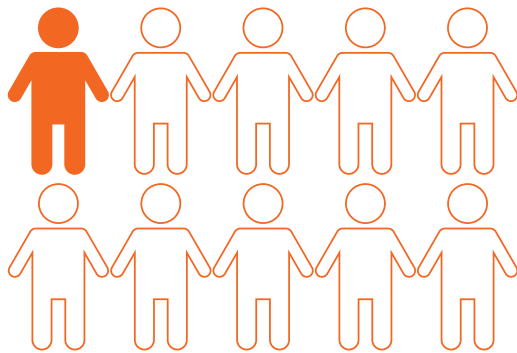


What Works for Arizona Families Living in Rural Communities to get Enough Nutritious and Affordable Food?

The **Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition (GSCN)** collaborated with **No Kid Hungry (NKH)** to lead a study in Arizona, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, and Texas. Local practitioners and families in rural communities were asked to identify and rank policy, system, and environment (PSE) strategies that ensure families living in rural communities get enough nutritious and affordable food.¹ PSE strategies are important to create healthier and more equitable communities. This state brief focuses on Arizona.

Hunger and Rurality in Arizona

1 in 10 people in Arizona face hunger²



766,272 people in Arizona live in a rural area³



What are PSE Strategies?

- P=** **Policy**
Change is at legislative and organizational levels and include laws, ordinances, regulations, and rules.
- S=** **System**
Shifts are made in the way problems are solved within organizations, institutions, or communities.
- E=** **Environment**
Change is made in economic, social, and physical environments.



¹ Rural Health Information Hub. Policy, systems, and environmental change. Available at: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/health-promotion/2/strategies/policy-systems-environmental>.

² What hunger looks like in Arizona. Available at: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/arizona>.

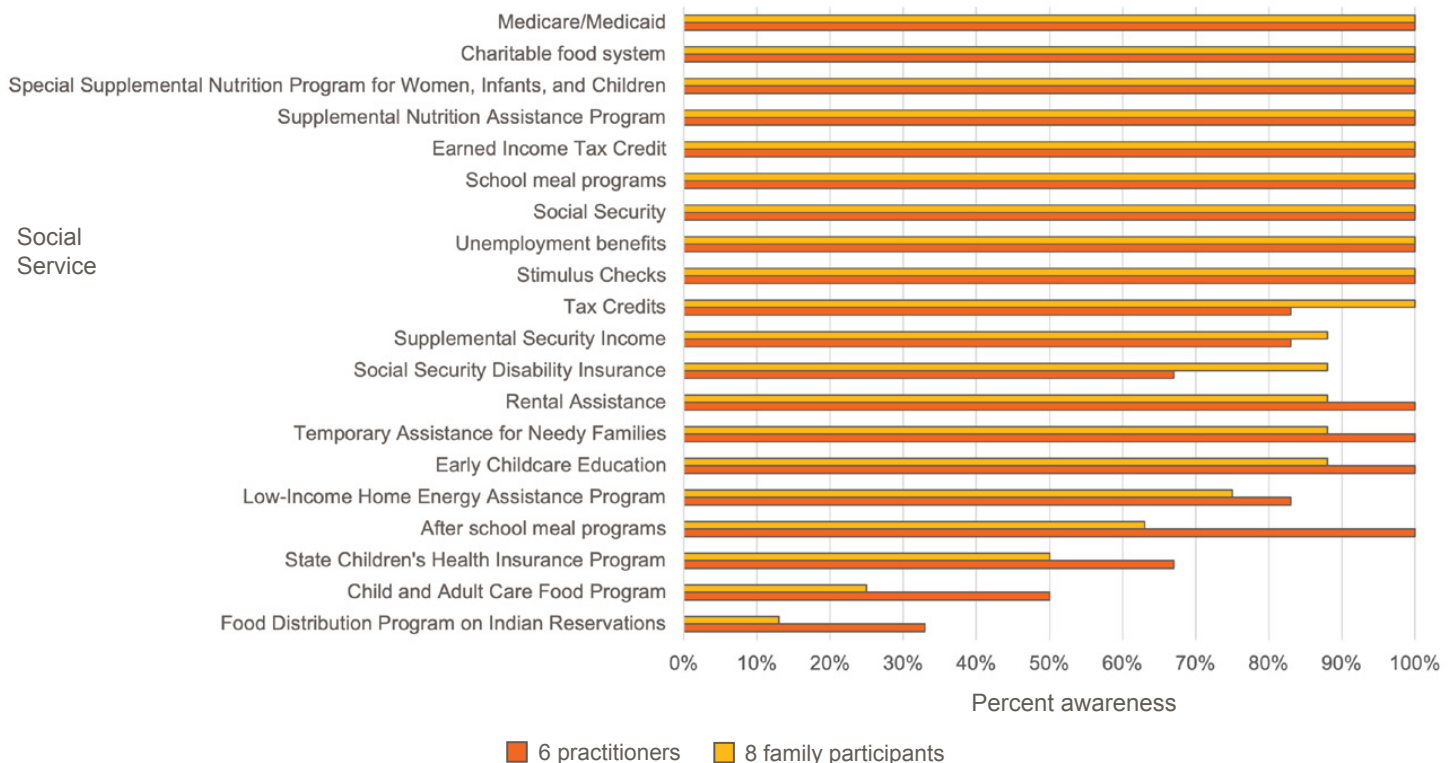
³ Rurality rates in Arizona. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html>.

Breakdown of Participation by Study Phases

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Total Interviews	Total Surveys	Total Focus Group Participants
30 Practitioners 42 Family participants	8 No Kid Hungry (NKH) staff 12 practitioners 26 family participants	7 NKH staff 5 practitioners 10 family participants
Arizona Interviews	Arizona Surveys	Arizona Focus Group Participants
6 Practitioners 8 Family participants	2 Practitioners 8 Family participants	1 Practitioner 3 Family participants

Awareness of Social Services in Arizona^{4,5}

During the interviews, Arizona practitioners and family participants noted if they were aware of the following social services. Across programs, Arizona practitioners had an average awareness of 94%, and family participants had an awareness of 69%. The programs with greatest awareness among family participants were food assistance programs and stimulus checks. The programs with lowest awareness among family participants were food assistance programs that prioritize specific communities like FDPIR and CACFP.



⁴ Practitioners working in Arizona were employed in community family resources (2 participants), Department of Health (1 participant), Extension (1 participant), and school nutrition (2 participants). Family participants living in Arizona self-reported race and ethnicity as American Indian (1 participant), Hispanic (1 participant), more than 1 race (2 participants), and white (4 participants).

⁵ Family participants met the eligibility criteria if they: had at least one child under age 18 in the household, lived in a rural place, and received support from at least one income-based social service were contacted for an interview.

PSE Strategies for Rural Families to Get Enough Nutritious and Affordable Food

13 PSE strategies were co-developed from all interview participants. Beside those strategies, example quotes from practitioners and family participants in Arizona are listed.

Strategy	Example Quotes from Arizona Participants
Make people more aware of the programs	"It's more helping people on Facebook [to learn about the programs], because they can't go through other resources." — <i>Family participant</i>
Make it easier to sign-up	"I'd love to see policies that streamline the application process for all of this..." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Make it trouble free for people to use programs	"[We've used] WIC and that was really helpful and pretty easy to do. It was easy to apply and easy to keep up with because during the [recertification] call [during COVID] it was pretty much phone interviews." — <i>Family participant</i>
Chances for people to suggest changes	"If people would know, and if they had the right information, I think they could be able to [make changes] but I just don't think they're being informed as well." — <i>Family participant</i>
Expand food banks (e.g. charitable food systems)	"For me with my gluten intolerance [food pantries are hard], because they do a lot of pasta and stuff, there are no gluten free options..." — <i>Family participant</i>
Expand school nutrition programs	"During COVID school offered free lunches and they have different locations... even during summer time. If you have locations that you can pick it up that's really helpful." — <i>Family participant</i>
Provide more places to get food locally	"We have the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program here in Arizona." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Learn about buying and making healthy foods on a budget	"They were also trying to launch some more opportunities over zoom. We have nutrition classes that our state office holds. Those are something they're hoping to keep for the long term..." — <i>Practitioner</i>
More childcare options and early childhood education	"We run a preschool here this year and it's free. They have 30 kids in their program, and they feed them breakfast and lunch. That probably does help the families with childcare at least for a little bit for the day." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Expand employment	"Most of the people here work in the hospitality industry, or restaurant businesses, so they don't make a lot of money. I know that there are several families that are living with multiple people in one home." — <i>Family participant</i>
Increase access to affordable health care	"There's a medical provider here that has three mobile medical vans, and they're going out to the rural communities and providing services for low income families and undocumented families..." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Make housing more affordable	"A lot of people that live out here, live off grid because they can't afford the utilities. So when they live off grid, there is almost no communication for them." — <i>Family participant</i>
Make it easier to get from place to place	"Most families in rural areas have to drive further and with the gas prices, most of our money goes towards gas versus groceries. With all the prices going up on groceries and everything, it's hard to restrict your money." — <i>Family participant</i>

Support for PSE Strategies and Activities: Survey Results from All Study Participants

Very high support
 High support
 Moderate support
 Low support

PSE Strategies and Activities ⁶	Level of Support ⁷
Strategy: Make people more aware of services Activities: Advertising for these programs in creative ways such as through social media; advertising these programs in many locations in the community; local community members sharing how to sign up and use these programs; organizations employing bi-lingual staff members to tell people about programs.	High support
Strategy: Make it easier to sign up for programs Activities: Making sure there are local offices in rural communities where people can go to sign up for these programs; make program applications shorter; allow people to fill out one application that can be used for all of these programs	High support
Strategy: Make it trouble free for people to use programs Activities: Make it faster to start using these programs; change program rules for how people can use money or services; allow people to receive program services on the phone, video, or computer; make it easier to check out at grocery stores when using SNAP and WIC; make it easier to keep using and stay on these programs; make it easier for immigrants to use these programs; follow-up with families that are receiving programs	High support
Strategy: Provide chances for people to suggest changes to programs Activities: Offer ways for people to share their ideas for changes to policies; advocate for an increase in the amount of money that programs can give people; create more programs that help families after WIC ends when kids turn 6 years old	High support
Strategy: Expand food banks (e.g. charitable food systems) Activities: Open food banks for more hours; let people choose the foods they get at the food bank; provide more foods that give people from various cultures a “taste of home”; provide more foods that are good for food allergies or special diets like low sodium; increase funding for food banks; create food banks inside existing community spaces like churches, schools, health care clinics; build food banks in places that are easier to get to; provide more foods that are appealing	High support
Strategy: Expand school nutrition programs Activities: Serve more food during meals at school; provide free school lunch for all students; provide more places for school-age children to get meals; provide more school foods that give people from various cultures a “taste of home”; give leftover foods to students or food banks; make nutrition standards easier; create more summer free-food programs for school-age children; provide after school programs; provide more school supply drives; create more backpack programs that send kids home with food; teach nutrition and food skills to students at school	High support
Strategy: Provide more places to get food locally Activities: Start community gardens; let people donate meat from hunting to food banks; provide discounts at farmer’s markets; make the food at farmer’s markets less expensive; create mobile farmer’s markets; provide prescriptions for fruits and vegetables at health care clinics; work with food banks to offer fresh local foods	High support
Strategy: Provide options for people to learn about buying and making healthy foods on a budget Activities: Provide classes and resources in multiple languages; provide food skills classes online (website, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube); provide cooking classes; provide finance classes (budgeting, saving); provide food preservation classes (canning foods, freezing foods); provide food safety classes	Moderate support
Strategy: Make childcare options and early childhood education better fit the needs of families Activities: Provide bookmobiles and mobile libraries; provide free preschool; open more childcare locations; open childcare facilities for more hours	High support
Strategy: Expand employment Activities: Increase the minimum wage; create more job opportunities; provide people with more help when searching and applying for a job	High support
Strategy: Increase access to affordable health care Activities: Provide more health care options that cost less; provide mobile medical vans; provide more options for affordable mental health services	High support
Strategy: Make housing more affordable Activities: Provide help for paying for gas, electric, water, and other utilities; create limits on how much a family must pay for gas, electric, water, and other utilities; build more places to live that cost less	High support
Strategy: Make it easier to get from place to place Activities: Lower gas prices; provide free public transportation	High support

⁶ This table displays the combined scores of acceptability (the likability of the strategy for your community), appropriateness (whether the strategy is a good match for the community), and feasibility (how possible is the strategy in the community).

⁷ Scores were calculated for overall acceptability, appropriateness, and feasibility and divided into levels of support: low (≤50%), moderate (51-67%), high (68-84%), and very high (≥85%).

Support for PSE Strategies and Activities: Focus Group Results from Arizona Study Participants

“I'd also recommend [families] go to WIC. I wish it was just a one-stop shop sometimes, instead of having to go through different agencies. If you're going through one agency, I think they should be able to just take your information and send it to another agency that can help you instead of having to go through multiple agencies and getting turned down.” — *Family participant*

“There is nowhere for our people to go out here to sign up. I mean, a lot of them, I serve mostly kids who live in trailer [courts], so a lot of them don't have access to internet. They do have cell phone, but I'm not sure how feasible it is for them to get anywhere... So, I just don't know how these people sign up for these things.” — *Practitioner*

No Kid Hungry Programs Happening Across Arizona

NKH AZ works with **partners** to ensure every student is connected to healthy meals through programs like school meals, summer meals and SNAP.

This includes:

Supporting Schools:

We work with school districts, providing grant funding and technical assistance to ensure that more kids have access to three meals a day.

Advancing Equity:

Childhood hunger is the product of longtime systemic inequities. We prioritize support to underserved communities, seek out and share successful community-based solutions, and work to address the root causes of hunger.

Building Community Partnerships:

To reach underserved communities with healthy nutrition, we collaborate with community-based organizations and support innovative strategies to increase food access for kids.

Advocating for Kids:

We engage with elected officials and state leaders, including mayors and county and city leadership, to make sure that ending child hunger is prioritized by decision makers.

Recommendations for Arizona

Build Upon Arizona's Assets

Activities to accomplish a PSE strategy will differ depending upon each rural community's needs, which should be determined by local residents and invested practitioners. During surveys, focus groups, and interviews, families and practitioners shared ideas about how to implement PSE strategies in Arizona by building on assets that exist.

- 1 Leverage Arizona's existing networks like food pantries, grocery stores, healthcare sites, and childcare facilities to implement PSE strategies
- 2 Make people more aware of services using current outreach initiatives like social media
- 3 Implement PSE strategies and activities in rural locations through partnerships and pop up locations to make it trouble free for people to use programs
- 4 Employ and fairly pay community members at local places that implement PSE strategies
- 5 Provide local food at existing places in rural communities that implement PSE strategies

Questions about the study? Contact Carmen at cbshanks@centerfornutrition.org