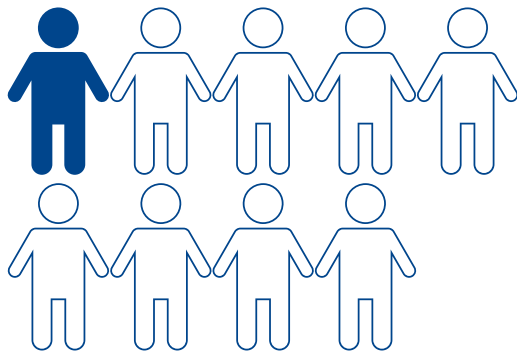


What Works for Michigan Families Living in Rural Communities to get Enough Nutritious and Affordable Food?

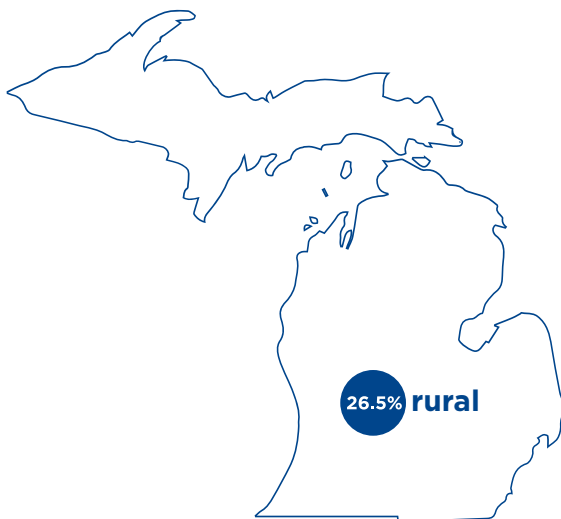
The **Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition (GSCN)** collaborated with **No Kid Hungry (NKH)** to lead a study in Arizona, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, and Texas. Local practitioners and families in rural communities were asked to identify and rank policy, system, and environment (PSE) strategies that 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 Michigan.

Hunger and Rurality in Michigan

1 in 9 people in Michigan face hunger²



2,673,073 people in Michigan 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 Michigan. Available at: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/michigan>.

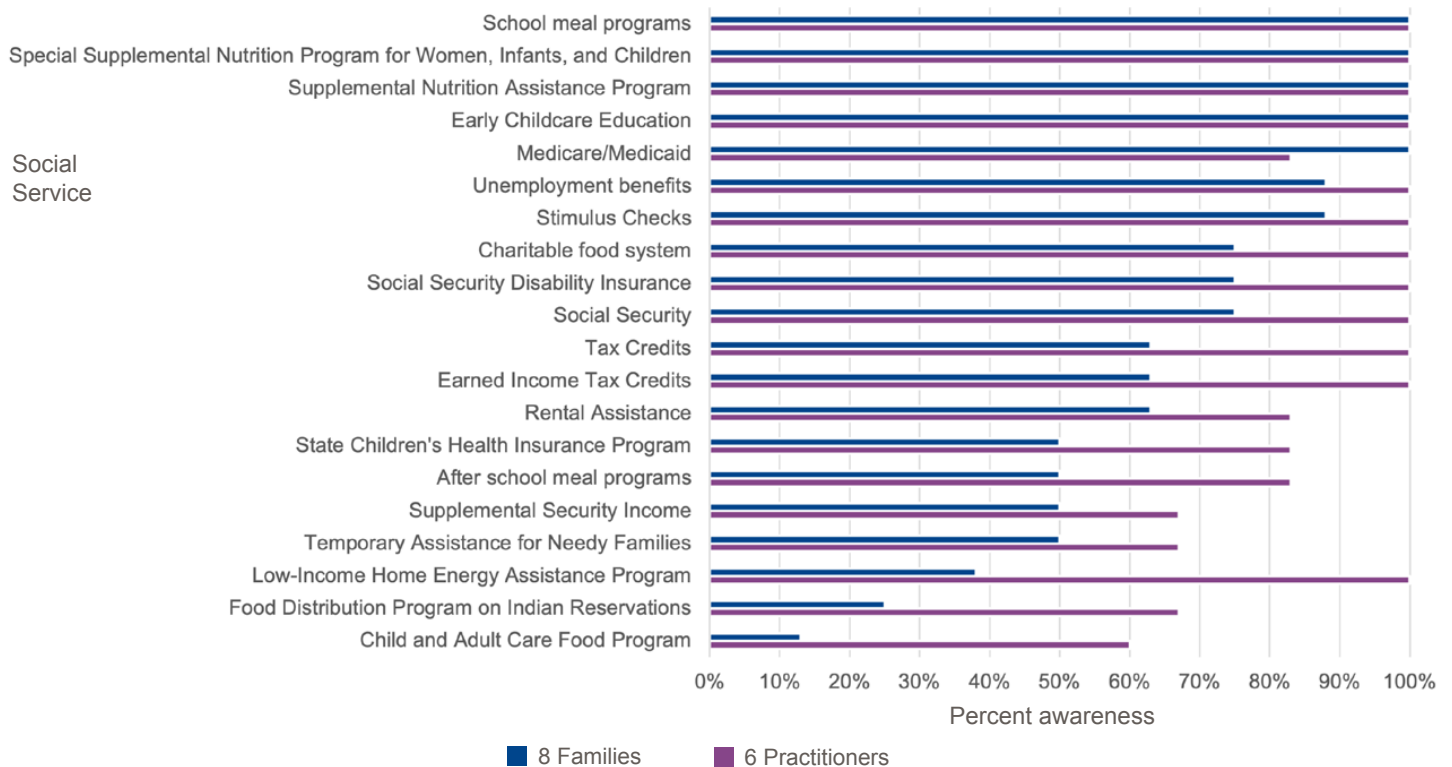
³ Rurality rates in Michigan. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html>.

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
Michigan Interviews	Michigan Surveys	Michigan Focus Group Participants
6 Practitioners 8 Family participants	3 Practitioners 3 Family participants	1 Practitioner 1 Family participants

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

During the interviews, Michigan practitioners and family participants noted if they were aware of the following social services. Across programs, Michigan practitioners had an average awareness of 90%, and family participants had an awareness of 68%. The programs with greatest awareness among family participants were food assistance programs, early childcare education, and healthcare programs like Medicare and Medicaid. The programs with lowest awareness among family participants were food assistance programs that prioritize specific communities like FDPIR and CACFP.



⁴ 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.

⁵ Practitioners working in Michigan were employed in community family resource setting (2 participants), Department of Health (2 participants), food systems (1 participant), and planning and region development (1 participant). Family participants living in Michigan self-reported race and ethnicity as Hispanic (4 participants) and White (4 participants).

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 Michigan are listed.

Strategy	Example Quotes from Michigan Participants
Make people more aware of the programs	"[Programs in my town] have a Facebook group and they also advertise it in our local advisor and our newspaper or they post signs around town. They have flyers that they send out with the kids at school..." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
Make it easier to sign-up	"I've had issues where [the social service] doesn't get any of my documents that I'm sending in. I work with people at the health department who will fax or mail in my documents... and they say they don't get them." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
Make it trouble free for people to use programs	"I went to a clinic to get medical attention and one of the nurses who attended me asked if I spoke English and I told her that I didn't, and she replied that it was bad that I had to know English because I was in the United States." — <i>Family participant speaking Spanish</i>
Chances for people to suggest changes	"We have a referral process to make sure everyone knows where to go and who to call and then utilizing that call chain to make sure families have an easy time accessing it." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Expand food banks (e.g. charitable food systems)	"There's no food pantry that is open every week... there's no place that is open daily and no place that has hot food." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Expand school nutrition programs	"Our church does a backpack buddies program, and they help kids get school supplies and clothes...Once a month they have a food distribution program. So kids that are less fortunate can go..." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
Provide more places to get food locally	"We need to invest in the infrastructure of our local producers in order to meet the demands... if we can utilize and support local producers and growers it helps make it affordable to local families." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Learn about buying and making healthy foods on a budget	"[Our state extension service] has a cooking program, where they teach you how to cook and that could be accessed more in our communities, because we just assume people know how to cook." — <i>Practitioner</i>
More childcare options and early childhood education	"To qualify [for daycare assistance] you have to be under a set income limit, and they don't look at any expenses for that program. If a family is over the income limit, they're automatically denied." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Expand employment	"With the cost of living right now and then what rent is and with inflation they have got to move how much they're paying people up, because no one can afford to live here or anywhere." — <i>Family speaking English</i>
Increase access to affordable health care	"With Medicaid, one of the biggest barriers is trying to find a place that actually takes Medicaid. The amount isn't always enough and then the quality of care if you have Medicaid is not very good." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Make housing more affordable	"There's [a community group] and they help people find housing." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
Make it easier to get from place to place	"If we could solve the transportation problem in the Upper Peninsula, that would help go a long way, because then people could get to the resources that they need, such as in the bigger areas..." — <i>Practitioner</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	Very 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 Michigan Study Participants

“The minimum wage should definitely be raised because even working above the minimum wage is hard.”
— *Family participant speaking English*

“I agree [that making it easier to sign up for programs is important], signing up is either too lengthy or it also is not accessible without assistance for our elders.” — *Practitioner*

No Kid Hungry Programs Happening Across Michigan

Michigan NKH is working to ensure students can get healthy meals throughout the school year. Michigan NKH is also collaborating with partners to help families access food during the summer.



Recommendations for Michigan

Build Upon Michigan'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 Michigan by building on assets that exist.

- 1 Leverage Michigan's existing networks like churches, 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