



New Initiatives to Address Hunger in East Boston - Putting Healthy Food Within Reach

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The Need: Addressing Food Insecurity

In Massachusetts today, 554,000 people are struggling to put food on the table, and the numbers continue to climb. Although great strides have been made to fully enroll all eligible residents in the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called food stamps) certain populations still are under-served by this program. In particular only 51% of eligible Latinos participate in SNAP as compared to 65% of all eligible state residents and the story is similar for Massachusetts elders. The high levels of food insecurity and hunger among East Boston residents threatens their health and well being.

Putting Healthy Food Within Reach

In December 2009, Project Bread received funding from three local foundations to support several new initiatives in East Boston including:

- 1) Food for Seniors – The goal of this project is to enroll elders in the SNAP program. Working with local community partners will help diminish stigma and educate elders on the program benefits.
- 2) Latino Nutrition Project – This project focuses on improving healthy eating among Latino families in East Boston and includes a variety of methods. Cooking demonstrations, parent ambassadors, nutrition workshops, partnerships with local agencies, and a strong education campaign are all components of this project which seeks to reduce obesity and promote healthy eating. Increasing participation in all federal nutrition programs is also a goal.
- 3) Latino Hunger Prevention Project - The goal of this initiative is to help people make ends meet by enrolling in SNAP. Targeted outreach will address unique barriers to participation and will seek to engage employers and unions as partners.

Why focus on increasing SNAP participation

SNAP is a federal nutrition program that helps people to buy the nutritious food they need for good health and is the cornerstone of the nation's nutrition safety net to prevent and alleviate food insecurity and hunger.

SNAP is good for families. Getting families enrolled builds their buying power and stretches their food dollars by 17 to 47 cents. SNAP benefits help people make ends meet by supplementing their food budgets, allowing them to stay independent, work toward self-sufficiency, and maintain their dignity.

SNAP promotes public health- particularly children's health. SNAP helps participants afford healthier foods, which is essential in preventing serious health and learning problems. Children who lack sufficient nutritional food have more difficulty concentrating in school as well as higher levels of anxiety, depression and obesity.¹

SNAP is good for local economies. SNAP brings federal funds into communities. Every SNAP dollar spent generates \$1.84 of economic activity in the community. In 2008, SNAP benefits brought over \$650 million to Massachusetts, generating \$1.2 billion in economic activity.

SNAP is good for businesses. Employees whose food needs are met at home are likely to have higher productivity and take fewer sick days.² Work supports such as SNAP can lead to improved retention.³

¹ "Study Warns of Hunger among Hispanics". Washington Post, December 2006

² "The Benefits of Increasing Food Participation in Your State", USDA Food Nutrition Services, November 15, 2007

³ "Getting Connected: Employer Engagement in Work Supports. CLASP Policy Paper, Workforce Development Series, May 2006, Policy Paper No. 1