



## **Strengthening Latino Families - Putting Healthy Food Within Reach**

### **The Need: Addressing food insecurity in the Latino community**

In Massachusetts today, 554,000 people are struggling to put food on the table, and the numbers continue to climb. Latino families face particularly high levels of food insecurity and hunger, threatening their health and wellbeing. 37% of Latinos households in low-income communities are food insecure, meaning they cannot afford to buy enough nutritious food for a healthy life. Latinos are also underutilizing effective federal nutrition programs, including the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called food stamps). Only 51% of eligible Latinos participate, compared to 65% of all eligible state residents.

### **The Response: A new initiative of Project Bread and the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)**

In October 2009, Project Bread and DTA won a highly competitive grant from the United States Department of Agriculture/ Food Nutrition Services (USDA/FNS) <sup>1</sup> to address food insecurity in the Latino community, particularly among lower-income workers (those at our near minimum wage, underemployed, or recently unemployed). This is a two-year pilot, in the cities of Chelsea and Worcester.<sup>2</sup>

The primary goal of this initiative is to increase SNAP participation among low-income Latinos. Targeted outreach will address unique barriers to participation and will seek to engage employers and unions as partners. A Steering Committee will be convened and strategic partnerships forged to involve a range of key players.

### **About SNAP**

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.

### **Why increasing SNAP participation makes sense**

**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 - especially for the growing and developing child. Children who lack sufficient nutritional food have more difficulty concentrating in school as well as higher levels of anxiety, depression and obesity.<sup>3</sup>

**SNAP is good for local economies.** SNAP brings additional federal funds into communities and serve as an economic stimulus. Every SNAP dollar spent generates \$1.84 of economic activity. 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.<sup>4</sup> Work supports such as SNAP can lead to improved retention.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Funded through a USDA/FNS grant: "Reaching the Latino Working Poor in Massachusetts".

<sup>2</sup> In Chelsea, this project will work in partnership and coordination with the *Healthy Chelsea* Project.

<sup>3</sup> "Study Warns of Hunger among Hispanics". Washington Post, December 2006

<sup>4</sup> "The Benefits of Increasing Food Participation in Your State", USDA Food Nutrition Services, November 15, 2007

<sup>5</sup> "Getting Connected: Employer Engagement in Work Supports. CLASP Policy Paper, Workforce Development Series, May 2006, Policy Paper 1