
**THEORY-DRIVEN EVALUATION QUESTION:**
“To what extent does SNAP-Ed programming facilitate access and create appeal for improved healthy eating and physical activity choices in the settings where people eat, learn, live, play, shop, and work?”

—SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework, Environmental Settings

**PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—Education (SNAP-Ed) is the country’s largest nutrition education and obesity prevention program. It is funded through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). SNAP-Ed’s public health approaches are designed to ensure that the investment in SNAP works, while addressing food insecurity and creating environments and community systems that help prevent obesity.

Maine SNAP-Ed uses evidence-based nutrition education, social marketing, and policy, systems, and environmental change strategies to help Maine families shop, cook, and eat healthy on a budget. The University of New England (UNE) administers the SNAP-Ed contract through the Maine Department of Health and Human Services’ Office for Family Independence. Through sub-contracts with community-based organizations, 27 highly trained nutrition educators reach low-income Mainers in all 16 counties.

**INTERVENTION OVERVIEW**

Maine SNAP-Ed has been implementing policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change strategies throughout Maine communities since 2015. PSE change is a public health approach to modifying the environment to make healthy choices practical and available to all community members. Nutrition educators select two annual objectives for implementation, developing local partnerships to adopt and promote obesity-prevention supports that respond to local need and can be sustained through lasting policies and local champions. PSE change efforts occur in qualified SNAP-Ed sites (e.g., emergency food agencies, public housing sites), primarily where educators are implementing direct nutrition education.

Maine SNAP-Ed’s 9 PSE intervention categories:

- Childcare Wellness
- School Wellness
- Healthy Retail
- Encourage Federal Food Assistance Participation for Youth
- Community Gardens
- Increase Access to Fruits and Vegetables
- Healthy Retail
- Worksite Wellness
- Healthcare Clinical-Community Linkages

**METHODS**

Program data are aggregated annually by objective using a monthly Excel-based tracking tool comprised of nutrition educators. The tracking tool includes drop-down menus for strategy selection, setting/site, monthly activities, promotion, and other planning and implementation steps.

The UNE evaluation team conducts semi-structured close-out interviews with each educator to supplement tracking tool data. Analysis is inclusive of more than 50 objectives and their associated settings and systems. Independent and collaborative reviews of aggregate annual data with a consensus decision-making process determine results for MTS: Nutrition Supports. Photographic evidence contributed by educators or collected during site visits supports determination of adoption.

**RESULTS**

The outcome measure for Environmental Level MTS: Nutrition Supports refers to a change in policy or practice to expand access or improve appeal for healthy food and beverages and “takes place when SNAP-Ed sites or organizations put into effect an evidence-based PSE change...”

The outcome measures (MTSa-f) along with Maine SNAP-Ed FY 2018 results are presented in the table below.

| MTSa. Number of sites or organizations that make at least one change in writing or practice to expand access or improve appeal for healthy eating | 48 sites/sites impacted |
| MTSb. Total number of policy changes | 0 (no policy changes) |
| MTSc. Total number of systems changes | 15 systems changes |
| MTSD. Total number of environmental changes | 30 environmental changes |
| MTSe. Total number of promotional efforts for a PSE change | 33 promotional efforts |
| MTsf. Reach: Total potential number of persons who encounter the improved environment or are affected by the change on a regular/typical basis and are assumed to be influenced by it | 19,740 Mainers reached |

**EXAMPLES OF MTSd.—ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES**

- 2 communities with new “Edible Main Street” gardens
- 3 schools, 3 food pantries, and 1 retail store with improved layout/display of healthy food
- 2 healthcare providers linking food-insecure patients to resources

**CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS**

The challenges of quantifying and reporting on outcomes for the complex environmental interventions implemented by SNAP-Ed programs are many—faceted and may need to be examined through the Implementation Science lens. The UNE team will explore this approach.

Future analyses will consider the following evaluation challenges:

- To what degree are changes adopted attributable (or not) to Maine SNAP-Ed?
- How to estimate reach for interventions that utilize population-level screening and provide systemic supports (e.g., F&B prescriptions).
- How to measure:
  - Individual-level behavioral outcomes related to environmental changes.
  - Dose for multi-level interventions (direct ed. + PSE + social marketing) and dosage for multi-year interventions.
- Sustainability of changes, particularly if intent is to transfer efforts to local champions.

**EVALUATION THEORY**

Maine SNAP-Ed programming and evaluation are informed by the USDA’s SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework. The Framework seeks to coordinate, standardize, and raise the level of evaluation practice across all 100+ SNAP-Ed implementing agencies in the US. The Framework is a theory-driven evaluation approach, rooted in the Social Ecological Model and designed to assess common impacts over time and across the spheres of influence (individual, environmental, and sectors of influence). SNAP-Ed evidence-based programming is being articulated. The Framework’s design represents the collaboration and expertise of representatives from state SNAP agencies, implementing universities and agencies, public health agencies, and other obesity prevention and food insecurity professionals.