

# Coordinated SNAP Outreach for Students

## A University of Minnesota Twin Cities Strategic Screening & Referral Program

### Problem

**Food insecurity - *the lack of consistent access to enough, healthy food* - is unacceptably high among students at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities and across the U.S.**

Nearly one in five (19%) University of Minnesota Twin Cities students worry they will run out of food before having money to buy more, or have run out of food.<sup>1</sup> College food insecurity is significantly associated with many adverse student outcomes, including health and academic outcomes, like difficulty concentrating in class, lower grade point average, and higher drop-out rates.<sup>2</sup>

**The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is an important resource to help students experiencing food insecurity meet their basic needs.**

SNAP is a federal program that provides benefits to low-income individuals and families that can be used at stores to purchase food. Research has shown SNAP improves food security and is associated with better health and lower health care costs.<sup>3</sup> However, staff, faculty, and students are often unaware that college students may be SNAP eligible. A recent national report found *3.3 million college students were eligible for SNAP but less than half participated in the program.*<sup>4</sup>

The goal of the Coordinated SNAP Outreach program is to connect eligible college students to SNAP benefits - a proven mechanism for reducing food insecurity - through strategic, targeted outreach that includes staff training, abbreviated eligibility screening and student communication.

### Overview: SNAP Screening and Referral

#### Abbreviated SNAP screening survey

Eligibility criteria for SNAP can be nuanced and confusing. Guided by experts, we condensed student eligibility criteria into [an abbreviated screener](#) for easy dissemination across campus. Students who are likely eligible based on the screener results provide contact information, which is then forward to our external SNAP Outreach Team partners at Second Harvest to confirm eligibility and assist with the application process. The abbreviated screener is:

- Embedded in the evaluation survey given to all Nutritious U Food Pantry participants once per semester.
- Linked on the Nutritious U Food Pantry website ([boynton.umn.edu/food-pantry](http://boynton.umn.edu/food-pantry)).
- Printed on business cards also shared with pantry participants, should they wish to be screened later. These cards are disseminated by trained staff partners serving in key student service units across campus, including financial aid counselors, academic advisors, and others.

Each semester, the Office for Student Finance also identifies all work study students and sends [a targeted email](#) with information about potential SNAP eligibility. The student can simply forward the email to our external SNAP Outreach Team partners at Second Harvest to initiate the screening process.

## Partnerships

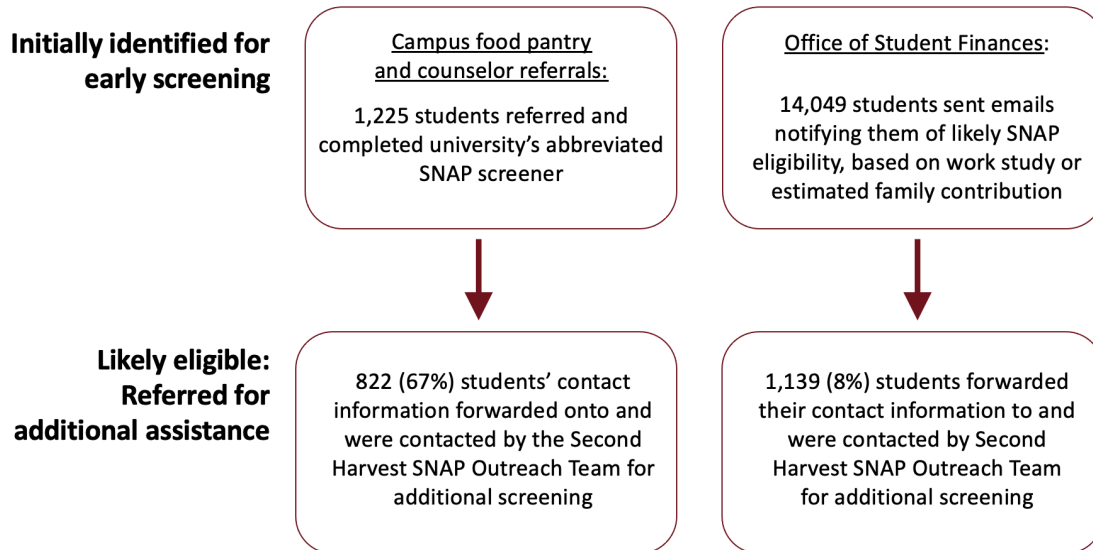
Collaboration with on- and off-campus partners is key to connect students to SNAP benefits. Partnerships with organizations are listed below.

<p><b>Second Harvest Heartland</b></p> <p><i>A Feeding America food bank serving greater Minnesota that offers SNAP outreach as one of its many services.</i></p>	<p>The Second Harvest SNAP Outreach Team specializes in raising awareness about SNAP and assisting in screening and application. They also provide post-application follow up with counties and applicants.</p> <p>We partner with the SNAP Outreach Team to streamline student referrals and applications. Students are screened for general eligibility and then referred to the SNAP Outreach Specialists who confirm eligibility and assist with applications.</p>
<p><b>Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)</b></p> <p><i>A key state agency providing essential services to Minnesota's most vulnerable residents.</i></p>	<p>The Department of Human Services administers SNAP in Minnesota, helping low-income individuals meet their food needs.</p> <p>We work closely with the DHS SNAP Policy analyst team to ensure we are accurately interpreting SNAP policy, particularly as it relates to student eligibility. This included many initial conversations and now quarterly calls scheduled with the SNAP policy team.</p>
<p><b>University of Minnesota Office of Student Finance</b></p> <p><i>The managing office for financial aid, including student work study, a key indicator of SNAP eligibility.</i></p>	<p>This partnership allows us to send targeted emails to students with a work study job informing them that they are likely eligible for SNAP benefits. These emails directly refer students to the SNAP Outreach Team at Second Harvest should they choose to apply for benefits.</p>
<p><b>University of Minnesota One Stop Student Services</b></p> <p><i>A central office that provides advice to students on registration, financial aid, billing, student records, and veterans benefits.</i></p>	<p>One Stop Student Services employs Financial Aid Counselors that meet with students on a regular basis to advise on financial aid, among other issues. Through our partnership with this office, we train and provide critical information to student counsellors so they can, in turn, serve as another key point of referral for the SNAP screening process.</p>

# Ongoing Evaluation

## Process Evaluation

### Coordinated SNAP Outreach Program: Fall 2019 – Spring 2021



## Program Evaluation

At the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, Boynton Health is being supported by the School of Public Health in its systematic evaluation of the screening program, including its impact on SNAP enrollment and barriers to participation. The evaluation includes two key components: (a) anonymous surveys of students who have been identified as likely eligible for SNAP and (b) qualitative, in-depth interviews. Subsequently, selected students will be invited to participate in follow up interviews with student participants. Results are expected in Summer 2021.

## Statewide Expansion Efforts

### SNAP for Students Statewide Coalition

In 2021, the University of Minnesota Twin Cities began a statewide coalition for colleges and universities to share resources and information related to SNAP, connect key state stakeholders working with SNAP, and provide technical assistance for colleges and universities in referring their students.

Stakeholders from 32 schools (14 two-year, 10 four-year, 6 private, and 2 tribal) have met biweekly since March to better understand SNAP policy for students, share resources, and create their own strategic SNAP screening program for their campus. Each institution had varying levels of food insecurity initiatives, but none had a coordinated SNAP outreach program. The work of this coalition is ongoing, but we are on pace to have every school implement some or all components of a coordinated SNAP outreach program by Fall 2021.

## Collaboration with the Office of Higher Education and Department of Human Services

We have a strong partnership with the Office of Higher Education, as well as the Minnesota Department of Human Services, leading to a more streamlined approach to connecting students to SNAP benefits.

In 2021, the Office of Higher Education directly notified over 94,000 students in Minnesota about their potential eligibility for SNAP in addition to alerting institutions of higher education to the recent federal SNAP eligibility expansion to enhance student enrollment. We assisted with these notifications, providing language and resources to help schools and students understand the policy and ways to apply.

In addition, DHS has incorporated specific college student training for county workers when reviewing SNAP applications from students, made key clarifications to their financial aid form to facilitate student applications, and built connections with university financial aid staff to improve the SNAP application process for students.

## Recommended Citation

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More information is also available at: <https://z.umn.edu/hungry2learn>.

## References

1. Boynton Health College Student Health Survey Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota; 2018. Available from: <https://boynton.umn.edu/sites/boynton.umn.edu/files/2018-11/CSHS-2018-UMN-Twin-Cities.pdf>.
2. Bruening M, Argo K, Payne-Sturges D, Laska M. The struggle is real: A systematic review of food insecurity on postsecondary education campuses. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2017;117(11):1767-91.
3. Steven Carlson and Brynne Keith-Jennings. SNAP Is Linked with Improved Nutritional Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. January 2018. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-nutritional-outcomes-and-lower-health-care>
4. Government Accountability Office. Food Insecurity: Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits. December 2018. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-95>