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ALASKA SNAP-ED OVERVIEW

Alaska’s relatively small 2016 estimated population of 741,894 and massive surface area of 665,384 square miles makes it the most sparsely populated state (1.2 people per mile). After the 2010 census, it ranked 48th in total population. With three-quarters of the population centered in three urban areas and the rest of the population widely scattered throughout the state, Alaska has the unique challenge of meeting the needs of low-income residents of dense urban centers and remote, roadless villages.

Due to the demands of serving such a disparate population, Alaska’s 2014 SNAP-Ed Needs Assessment prioritized five areas of the state that are either urban boroughs or rural regional hubs. It also identified Alaska Native people as having a high need for SNAP-Ed services, along with K-12 children and families with young children. Low levels of fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity were also identified as priority areas to address, and the needs assessment further recommended creating culturally nutrition education materials specifically targeted to Alaska Native people in rural Alaska, as well as utilizing partnerships to increase the reach of the SNAP-Ed program.

Since FY 2015, the Alaska SNAP-Ed program has been implementing those recommendations. Major accomplishments over the last three years include:

- Forming a Statewide Nutrition Action Committee and Arctic Nutrition & Food Security Network
- Partnering with Division of Subsistence to better understand how subsistence foods and supplemental benefits such as SNAP and WIC influence food security in remote, rural regions of the state
- Partnering with Center for Alaska Native Health Research to develop a culturally appropriate nutrition education curriculum for distance delivery to Alaska Native people in rural Alaska
- Contracting with a media strategy firm to develop a social marketing plan to promote fruit and vegetable consumption
- Created an infographic to promote the SNAP-Ed program
- Designing an RFP that included priorities from the needs assessment and awarding competitive grants for delivery of SNAP-Ed services for the first time
- Providing annual, in person trainings to grantees and technical assistance throughout the year

Today, three grantees currently provide SNAP-Ed services in Alaskan communities:

- University of Alaska Fairbanks, Cooperative Extension Services
- Alaska Islands Community Services a division of Southeast Alaska Regional Health Corporation
- Southcentral Foundation

COMMUNITIES

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<th>Fairbanks</th>
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The Alaska SNAP-Ed program’s grantees:
- Served seven regions of the state with direct nutrition education
- Offered 257 nutrition education classes
- Reached 2,036 participants with direct education
  - 1090 were youth
  - 946 Adult
  - 33% were Alaska Native
- Touched nearly 30,000 more individuals through indirect activities and PSE’s

**NEXT STEPS**

As the Alaska SNAP-Ed program enters 2018, it is looking forward to continuing to refine and enhance its SNAP-Ed program to provide high quality, innovative and cost-effective SNAP-Ed services. To that aim, projects are underway to:

- Begin implementation of the Social Marketing Plan
- Update the 2014 Needs Assessment with a focus on policy, systems and environmental change activities
- Revise the RFP process to incorporate findings from the needs assessment and create greater focus and cohesion among Alaska SNAP-Ed grantees
- Implement PEARs to improve program reporting and evaluation from grantees.
- Continue to use research and partnerships to strengthen the SNAP-Ed programs reach and effectiveness.

While the State of Alaska’s budget situation is still uncertain, Family Nutrition Programs has been approved to post a program position that has been vacant for more than a year, adding additional staff capacity to help manage these exciting projects. As the state refines its RFP and selects new grantees, it also looks forward to moving toward a multi-year state planning process.
GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT: ALASKA ISLANDS COMMUNITY SERVICES

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Alaska Islands Community Services (AICS) program works in the small Southeast community of Wrangell. They have a multifaceted program that focuses on young children in early care and learning sites, seniors and other low-income community members. The Wrangell SNAP-Ed program continues to wow with how much they can accomplish with a very small budget.

AICS provides series-based nutrition and physical exercise classes in Wrangell for seniors using the Eating Smart Live Strong and Staying Active and Independent for Life curriculums. They also offer a regular yoga class for all ages. They continue to promote the use of the Color Me Healthy Curriculum in qualifying early care and learning sites throughout Wrangell, using a train the trainer model.

This year, AICS added a new program worked with the local Head Start program to modify the Smarter Lunchrooms scorecard for use in early care and learning sites. An assessment was performed and working on including more fruits and vegetables at snack time was selected as a goal. Also new this year, the nutrition educator provided nutrition information and education during the monthly Commodity Supplemental Food box distribution at a local food pantry.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 1 Smarter Lunchrooms score-card completed
- 3 early care & learning sites used Color Me Healthy
- 50 participants in direct education – series-based healthy nutrition and activity classes
  - 42 of participants were seniors
  - 20% of participants were Alaska Native
- 7 community partners including grocery stores, food banks and faith-based organizations

CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS

During FY 17 Alaska Islands Community Services merged with Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC), a larger regional Tribal health entity. This merger took a lot of time and energy from all program staff. The merger with SEARHC made it difficult for clinic staff to get the buy-in needed from medical providers and clinic staff to implement the medical referrals program, as the staff was hesitant to make changes during the merger. However, SEARHC has a multi-faceted Wellness Program that focuses on many of the same health promotion goals as SNAP-Ed. We believe as the programs become more integrated, Wrangell’s SNAP-Ed program may benefit from the additional expertise and leadership that SEARHC staff has on topics of interest to their program.

As a part of the merger, the Wrangell SNAP-Ed program received a new Program Manager in early FY 18. She has also received training and technical assistance from the State SNAP-Ed program.
UAF CES’s SNAP-Ed program provides SNAP-Ed services in six Alaskan communities: Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Kenai, Mat-Su and Tok. Each community offers a range of indirect and direct education, as well as working towards policy or environmental changes related to fruit and vegetable promotion.

Nutrition Educators use Eating Smart Being Active, Cooking Matters at the Store, and Show Me Nutrition as their primary curriculums, as well as MyPlate materials and recipes. Educators write columns for the newspapers and appear on radio shows, lead summer gardening programs with youth and adults, work with teachers in school classrooms, and partner with community and school gardens to promote growing and eating local produce, provide series instruction at residential treatment and rehabilitation centers and grocery store tours in low income neighborhoods. The highlights of their programs are the local Nutrition Educators, who are passionate, knowledgeable and have great relationships in their communities.

UAF CES, the oldest Alaskan SNAP-Ed implementing agency, has traditionally held primarily one session education events. In their revised service plan, they have made a commitment to transition to an increase in series-based delivery and use one-time lessons to introduce individuals to the SNAP-Ed program and recruit them into series classes.

Bethel Highlights

Bethel is a small community located in Western Alaska. It is not accessible by road and is a regional hub to 56 communities. There are just over 6,000 people in Bethel. Eighty-two percent of the people in Bethel are Alaska Native or Native American. Many residents still practice a subsistence lifestyle. Eighty-nine percent of low-income people in Bethel are Alaska Native/Native American.

CES’s Nutrition Educator in Bethel, Sharon Chakuchin, works primarily with youth. She has also been partnering with the State of Alaska to get the Tundra to Table materials out into the community. Sharon recently presented to a youth group, and received the following feedback on the input of her visit:

“We have started adding more veggies and fruits in our snacks that we provide our youth and young adult meetings. I have seen those that have attended bringing fruits to gatherings more rather than chips.”
Kenai Peninsula Highlights

The Kenai Peninsula is located in southcentral Alaska. There are several communities in the Kenai Borough with a total population of around 55,000 people spread over 16,000 miles. Eighty-four percent of the population is Caucasian, and just 8% is Alaska Native. Kenai Nutrition Educator Amorette Payment uses the Eating Smart, Being Active curriculum with adults and Show Me Nutrition with youth. Last year, Amorette worked with the local Boys & Girls Club on a community garden. Program staff reported,

“Amorette provides a wonderful curriculum teaching member about the joy and benefits of “eating a rainbow” and being active. Adding a hands-on portion what the members get to plant, care for, and harvest lettuce, provides a new and interesting way for members to experience healthy eating and living. Ending the program with a salad celebration where all members attending today had a chance to eat veggies that they grew and harvested was a joyful way to wrap things up….We all noticed that many of the members went back for seconds, and thirds even, when we had a difficult time getting members to try veggies when they first started in the program. Also, several of the members said that they were going to get their parents to buy more veggies.”

She has also regularly submits articles for the Learning for Life column in the local newspaper, the Peninsula Clarion, on nutrition topics. Recent articles have discussed getting back on track after the holidays, portion distortion, healthy holidays, smart snacking for kids, and how to save more at the grocery store.

Tok Highlights

Tok is a small community on the road-system located just a few hours from Fairbanks. Tok only has about 1,200 people and just 12% of the people in Tok are Alaska Native or Native American. However, many of the surrounding communities such as Tetlin, Tanacross and Northway Village have are mostly Alaska Native people, and all students in the school district receive free meals. Tok Nutrition Educator Rita Abel has an active youth-focused SNAP-Ed program which makes excellent use of the school greenhouse. A recent article in the newspaper highlights her successes.

Rita brings a practical, lesson-based approach to her students, whether they are visiting the district’s greenhouse or learning the basics of how a plant grows. With a background in teaching home economics, she sees nutrition education as the critical component in making farm-to-school programming a sustainable lesson for her students.

“We need these skills, and my lessons tie in to the lessons students are receiving in other classes. Math, science, health—all of those things are involved in nutrition. Cooperative Extension has the opportunity to bring in that component; to tie-in the trip to the
Rita has also successfully started a fitness class that is open to the public in Tok. Rita and other partners found equipment, got the room set up and advertised it. Participants now take turns leading the fitness class.

**Fairbanks Highlights**

Fairbanks is Alaska’s third largest population center with close to 100,000 people in the Fairbanks-North Star Borough. It is still a rather rural community with 7% of the population Alaska Native or Native American. South Fairbanks is considered a food desert, and Nutrition Educator Reina Hastings worked on an environmental change at a local convenience store to increase resident’s access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

With Reina’s assistance, the market applied to accept EBT cards. Language barriers were a challenge, but Reina worked with the owners to find Mandarin translators to help navigate the application process. She also connected the owners with local farmers market vendors, who were interested in selling fresh produce at the market. She hopes to hold nutrition education classes at the convenience store later in the year.

Reina also works in several different schools, delivering Show Me Nutrition to elementary aged youth. A teacher at a local elementary school noted,

>“Reina does a fantastic job making learning about health and nutrition fun for my 1st graders. They enjoy the exercise, food groups, and bacteria (clean hands) lessons, which are active and engaging. Every day the students ask each other, "Do you have all of the food groups?" when it’s time to eat lunch. I have been trying to exercise more in my classroom during brain breaks.”

**Mat-Su Highlights**

The Mat-Su Borough is the fastest growing region of the state. Spread over 24,000 square miles, it encompasses a huge geographic region with a sprawling population of close to 100,000. Just 6% of the population of the Mat-Su is Alaska Native or American Indian and 41% of children are enrolled in free/reduced price school meal programs. The Mat-Su is known as a farming community and grows legendary produce during the short and intense growing summer growing season.

In the Mat-Su, Nutrition Educator Adair Harmon has continued CES’s work on a community project called Alaska Tilth. The Alaska Tilth project is a collaboration between Alaska Pacific University’s Spring Creek Farm, CES and local food pantries to distribute healthy produce in the Mat-Su. Each year the program donates thousands of pounds of food to local food pantries which distribute them to local families.

Adair provides food demonstrations at a food pantry pick-up sites to show people how to use the produce in the boxes. Class topics have included: spring greens, fresh salads, radish and turnip, spicy bok choy, beets and quinoa, kale and kohlrabi. Comments from attendees have been very positive.
"My husband & I have been changing our diet to incorporate more fruits & veggies"

"Motivating - I want to eat better and use all the produce I grow & buy. The recipes make a big difference."

"I have been having more salads since I started coming here. Thanks for the recipes & ideas."

"Cooking with bok choy is yummy! First experience for me!"

"[Learned] new ingredients, healthier cooking techniques"

"Love the intro to new vegetables"

**Anchorage Highlights**

Anchorage is Alaska’s largest city and has more than half of the state’s population, with over 300,000 people. It is also an incredibly diverse community, in addition to being known as Alaska’s largest village, more than 100 languages are spoken in the Anchorage School district. Thirty-six schools in Anchorage qualified for the community eligibility provision during the 2016-17 school year. It is also one of few communities in Alaska that has qualified census tracts for delivering SNAP-Ed services.

Nutrition Educator Kat Anderson has a well-respected SNAP-Ed program. This past year, she started a community garden project with the children at Hampstead Health and Adelaide, low-income housing facilities. Working with a volunteer Master Gardener, Kat worked with kids to plant, maintain and harvest the produce from the gardens each week, providing nutrition education and food demonstrations to help residents learn how to use the produce. The kids had a blast!

"I was able to taste a lot of the cauliflower. Also tried the chives. Excellent!" Adelaide resident

"I feel great. I love these classes. I love this group. I’ve learned a lot and I’m happy with the facilitator and everything I’ve learned." NS

"The cooking and nutrition classes are by far the most popular classes with the youth." JS
UAF CES MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 1,986 participants in direct education
  - 55% youth and 45% adults
  - 33% of participants were Alaska Native people

- 144 single session classes and 87 series-based sessions

- 27,297 indirect contacts through distribution of education materials and YouTube/public broadcasting video series

- Worked with 28 partners including schools, Tribal organizations, health care organizations, local nonprofits, food stores, food banks, and farmers markets

- Completed a needs assessment to improve targeting of services

UAF CES CHALLENGES & NEXT STEPS

As mentioned before, UAS CES has traditionally provided cooking demonstrations with recipe handouts at various venues. In year three, the State expects a significant increase in the number of series offered and more participants that will have long term positive outcomes from that nutrition and activity education.

FY 17 was a challenging year for UAF CES from an administrative standpoint, and the program received significant technical assistance from the state to remain in compliance with state reporting and evaluation requirements and to create better linkage between planned activities and what services were actually delivered. Federal and State management evaluations conducted in FY 17 helped to identify specific areas for improvement.

UAF CES conducted a needs assessment in FY 17 to better understand the needs in the communities it serves and will incorporate those findings into their FY 19 service plan. Additionally, a retention study has provided additional information about class completion and will aid in ensuring services delivery is appropriate for the target audiences. Their Policy and Procedure manual also underwent extensive review and updating to address areas of concern from the state’s management evaluation.

Earlier in FY 17 the long-time Project Director, Roxie Dinstel, transitioned to a new position and oversight of the SNAP-Ed program, shifted to Linda Tannehill on the Kenai Peninsula. Upon recommendations of the USDA team, the prior Fairbanks nutrition educator, Reina Hastings, has taken over as the program coordinator. The State is providing training and technical assistance to help this new leadership team be successful.
GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT: SOUTHCENTRAL FOUNDATION

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Alaska SNAP-Ed was thrilled to welcome a new grantee into the program in the last quarter of FY17. The Anchorage/Mat-Su region was considered underserved by the State. Southcentral Foundation is an award-winning Alaska Native owned non-profit health corporation with more than 2000 employees and 80 programs. Family wellness is one of its corporate goals.

Southcentral Foundation is working with a vulnerable population of homeless youth through a partnership with Covenant House, the local homeless shelter for at risk teens. In addition to offering classes at Covenant House, they will also offer classes at Rites of Passage and Passage House, which provides transitional housing. Passage House specifically serves pregnant and parenting teens.

They will be using the Eating Smart, Being Active curriculum in a quarterly series of 12 weekly Healthy Cooking Classes, delivered in one-hour session for up to 12 participants as part of the youth’s life skills curriculum. Three additional components are added for the Passage House pregnant teens focused on their unique needs; eating smart and being active during pregnancy, feeding your new baby and solid foods.

In FY17, their program was still in the set-up phase, with staff being trained, supplies purchased and schedules developed. The State visited in September 2017 to learn more about Southcentral Foundation’s program. All Southcentral Foundation staff participated in the State’s September 2017 grantee training.

NEXT STEPS

Classes will begin in FY 18. Southcentral Foundation also has a clinic within Covenant House which provides some additional potential for referrals to the program. They have been working with the facility cook and have plans for a garden project in the spring. As an organization, Southcentral Foundation has a significant health and wellness program operating in Anchorage, as well as communities throughout Alaska, including in rural regions.
SPECIAL PROJECT: DIVISION OF SUBSISTENCE FOOD SECURITY SURVEY

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Alaska SNAP-Ed program is in its second year of partnering with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence (DOS). In Alaska, especially in rural communities, the ability for a household to achieve food security as defined by the USDA relies on both foods available through the market as well as those procured from the wild. Alaska is also unique in that residents of some remote and rural villages may apply to use SNAP to purchase subsistence gear, such as fishing nets and hooks, or gardening materials including soil and seeds.

"Obviously food access. The villages don't even have a village store and the things that are available in the store are just all poor choices. I was in a village last week and we went to the store and there was maybe two nutritious things and that was just a box of pears, fresh pears that were rotting."

This project is a collaboration to better understand the impact of SNAP/WIC funds on a household’s level of food security, as well as the diet composition of rural Alaskans and their subsistence activities. In FY16, the DOS worked with the Center for Alaska Native Health Research to develop and test research questions for the field survey. In the 2017 field season, (representing harvest/use patterns in 2016) five communities (Central, King Cove, Cold Bay, Hoonah, and Atqasuk) used the SNAP-Ed Survey Module as a component to the ADF&G Division of Subsistence household surveys.

Initial findings are still being analyzed, but already point to interesting findings about access to foods that will be important for planning interventions for rural and remote Alaskans. For example:

- In Atqasuk: No respondents said that WIC or SNAP was important or very important to their diets. However, 100% of respondents said that wild food harvests were important.
- In Hoonah, Central, and Sand Point respondents cited health impacts as the biggest benefit of eating wild foods, with 33-64% of respondents agreeing in each community.

NEXT STEPS

The food security portion of the surveys were paused in Sand Point, after field researchers had difficulty with the question set. This points to field staff training and understanding of the purpose as being key factors that influence success. These surveys are still in development and will be modified in collaboration with field researchers and the Center for Alaska Native Health Research before being deployed in the FY 18 field season. DOS project lead, Marylynne Kostick, is also completing further analysis of the data gathered.
SPECIAL PROJECT: FRUIT & VEGETABLE SOCIAL MARKETING PLAN

PROJECT OVERVIEW
In FY 2017 the State continued to work on developing a statewide social marketing plan focused on Fruit and Vegetable Consumption. An RFP was developed and released, and a local firm with extensive expertise in social marketing planning and execution was hired to help the state conduct formative research and develop a plan for implementation. Northwest Strategies, the State’s contractor:

- Created an inventory of similar Social Marketing Campaigns focused on fruit and vegetable consumption
- Conducted key informant interviews with Alaskan stakeholders about barriers/perceptions around fruit and vegetable consumption
- Developed sample materials for testing
- Conducted focus groups in Anchorage and Bethel to select campaign theme
- Completed a three-year social marketing campaign plan

The campaign was designed with the following overarching objectives:

- Improve the likelihood that SNAP-eligible Alaskans will make healthy food choices and consume more fruits and vegetables
- Increase knowledge of the health benefits of canned and frozen fruits and vegetables as alternatives to fresh
- Increase understanding of how to mitigate the challenges of high cost and lack of availability
- Shift attitudes regarding convenience to consider convenient healthy options, whether they are gathered, grown or purchased

The two messages that were best received during focus group testing in Bethel and Anchorage, and will be developed further for the Social Marketing campaign are:

![Fruit and Vegetable Images]

NEXT STEPS
The State is currently working with the Alaska DHSS Public Information Office to develop an implementation plan for the social marketing plan. Staff transitions within the PIO’s office have led to some initial delays, but regular meetings are currently being held and the State expects to develop and issue an RFP for professional contract support during FY 18. The State is excited to develop the next phase of this social marketing plan.
SPECIAL PROJECT: GRANTEE TRAININGS & MEETINGS

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Grantees require regular training and technical assistance to be successful. Iris Matthews, the SNAP-Ed contractor, hosted several calls for grantees to discuss reporting requirements, EARS changes and other programmatic goals. In addition, all program administrators were required to complete the EARS training provided by USDA FNS this year.

The State also hosted a three-day in-person training for all SNAP-Ed staff in September 19th-21st, 2017. The training had a mixture of activities designed to:

- Ensure compliance with state and federal requirements
- Provide time for Nutrition Educators to network and share with each other
- Demonstrate new tools and concepts that will increase program effectiveness and accountability
- Increase knowledge of partner activities
- Broaden knowledge of health disparities, including ACEs that impact SNAP-Ed target audiences & explore SNAP-Ed’s role in Strengthening Families.

State partners who presented at the training included:

- SNAP outreach program
- Play Every Day campaign
- School Health and Wellness Program

Each grantee sent a minimum of two staff people, and the new grantee Southcentral Foundation sent five. All of the program coordinators and nutrition educators attended, along with some support staff.

New this year was that the grantee training was held in conjunction with the annual training for WIC Administrators, and several sessions were held jointly. A field trip was also conducted to give participants real-life experience with a new tool for PSE work, the Physical Activity Resource Assessment (PARA). Comments from the training survey included:

- “It was all really good! Thank you!”
- “I enjoyed the walks & evaluation part. “
- “Now I know how to connect with my local WIC coordinator. Great job!”
- “I can’t wait for implementation (of PEARS), it will really help standardize data collection.”

After a session on evaluation, a particularly important topic for local agencies, 100% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the importance of evaluation and their role in evaluating their programs.

NEXT STEPS

The State looks forward to hosting another training for grantees in FY18. In addition, the State will expand its quarterly calls with grantees to include the nutrition educators in addition to the program administrators. The first all-staff quarterly call is scheduled for February 2018.
SPECIAL PROJECT: MEETINGS & COLLABORATIONS

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The State continues to host regular meetings of the Statewide Nutrition Action Committee. This group is varied, and members continue to benefit from the regular updates and meetings. The state has found that the members prefer an informal format that allows for maximum sharing and discussion of projects. This year, the group has been particularly valuable for providing feedback on larger projects the state has under development including updating the SNAP-Ed Needs Assessment and developing the Social Marketing Plan. Members include:

- Diane Peck, Obesity Prevention & Control Program, DHHS
- Karol Fink, Obesity Prevention & Control Program, DHHS
- Dana Kent & Jennifer Johnson, WIC, DHHS
- Marcia Johnson, Wellness Program Manager, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium
- Marylynnne Kostick, Division of Subsistence
- Jo Dawson, Child Nutrition Programs, Department of Education & Early Development
- Johanna Heron, Farm to School, Department of Natural Resources
- Joan Gone, Senior Services, DHSS

The Arctic Food Security & Nutrition Network (AFSNN) is a cross-border collaboration that has continued to work on its shared goals:

1. Reduce food insecurity in Alaska and Yukon-Northern Canada
2. Make policy makers aware of what we are doing and how they can help
3. Establish cross-border relationships on food security and nutrition

Monthly meetings were held from October to May, and often featured a guest speaker to talk about research or food security work that they are doing. For example, Adrienne Christensen from the community of Port Heiden spoke about Alaska Community food production in her village and Cara Durr with the Food Bank of Alaska spoke about research on food security in Alaska.

Notable accomplishments include:

- Kathleen Wayne traveled to Whitehorse for the Arctic Institute of Community-based Research – Yukon Round Table on Food Security in May 2017.

NEXT STEPS

These partnerships and collaborations will continue in FY18. All partners continue to express a desire for the State to host in this forum. As the state puts works on planning for the next RFP process, and incorporating findings from the needs assessment and social marketing research, stakeholder groups, such as the SNAC, will continue to be valuable resources and potential partners for future work.