



July 15, 2022

To: The White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health

Re: Appendix – Stories and comments from listening sessions (June 28th, July 6th) by people with lived experience of hunger, anti-hunger workers, and advocates

“College students [without food] have to choose between rent, vs tuition and unfortunately may have to drop out for a semester and the likelihood of returning is a challenge. [There’s] also compromised immunity and mental health is what suffers. Students who suffer from food insecurity are likely to suffer from anxiety and depression. - *College Health Nurse in CA*

“When I was a struggling college student, I got a job at the school cafeteria intentionally so at the end of the night I could stash some of the leftovers behind the dumpster. That was part of my way to be able to afford rent and tuition and be able to feed myself. When it comes to struggles as a new father, I obviously wasn't going to have my daughters or wife go without food so that meant cutting back on meals for myself. Which then had impacts on my personal health, both social and emotional health. Now within the capacity where I'm facilitating food resources for others within the school district, a lot of tough choices that are coming with families even when we are doing these food distribution events are – do I miss time off work to go get food at the distribution? It's that juggle between the high cost of living or am I going to skip out on money for prescriptions, rent, electricity, or food for myself or for others?” - *Community member in Oceanside*

“The challenges during this pandemic has been tough on a lot of people, especially our houseless population. Access to get to the food, have to improvise and be innovative and make sacrifices and work together.” - *LA community organizer*

“My situation is first off I actually only eat maybe one time a day or every other day. It's hard but you have to struggle a lot until things can get better.” - *Community member in Los Angeles*

“Growing up my parents had a lot of medical bills. My dad would have to go cash in the birthday bonus at the casino so he could try and feed us. Throughout our whole lives we kept pushing through.

Most recently when I was in college, I had to make those tough decisions to try and afford some sort of housing. The place I had didn't even have a kitchen, it was a small five-by-five room. I had a student job but I would frequent our food pantry a lot on campus and I was very grateful for that. I also didn't have that nutritionally balanced meal all the time.

Upon graduating I am so lucky to have my current job and actually be in a position where I can give back to our students [by] doing food pantry at community college. I hope to make these experiences better than what I had to go through.” - *Community member in Fortuna*

“Doing well now with affordable housing that has a community garden. My husband and I experienced houselessness. It was 2011 and he went through a health challenge. We were living in expensive but beautiful Santa Barbara California. First, we started choosing medical over food. Then we had to choose housing over everything and we moved to [a] safe parking program the town had and slept in a cargo van in a church lot. We were on SNAP and the program would really help us but there would be times where the first two weeks we would be totally happy, we’d get our fruits and vegetables, which my husband is supposed to eat anti-inflammatory organic, but the last two weeks would be very anxiety and we would rely on food banks and they had fruits and vegetables but it was pretty rough. Some days we just wouldn’t eat ‘ok I’m fasting.’ I felt it was time to leave California, we were able to find where it was more affordable for food and housing but with inflation, it’s still happening.

When you eat healthy fruits and vegetables your health soars. When you can have food and know you’re going to have food, your mental well-being soars. But if you are living with the constant anxiety or when you go to sleep you think I have to pay this medical bill or whatever. People need to have access to fruits and vegetables.” - *Community member*

“I met a student who I work with intimately in my clinic. She went four years as an undergraduate struggling with food insecurity and she estimates by her senior year 6 in 10 were skipping meals, not paying their rent and living in housing that wasn’t totally appropriate to be able to eat. Then she went off to a public graduate program and they had a huge CalFresh (SNAP) table and they said ‘do you want \$250 a month for food?’ She signed up and is on CalFresh (SNAP).

I’ve instigated a CalFrsh screening for students through the health centers and linking them to food banks and CalFresh assistance. Only 1 in 5 students eligible are applying and more students could be utilizing.” - *College Health Nurse in California*

“CalFresh (SNAP) really helped me choose things that were ready to eat, even though we can’t buy hot stuff, but that was really helpful to buy cans of soup and quick things that don’t require cooking. - *Community member in Fortuna*

“I’m thankful for the CalFresh (SNAP) program but the only thing is when you file for homeless [the benefit] is so low. They only give you \$20 a month. I can’t wrap my head around that. The amount is so low. We don’t have really anything to start with. I hear a lot of stories of families that didn’t have anything before they got CalFresh but has opened up a lot of healthy choices for them. But for myself, it’s a little bit different the dollar amount is really low \$20 for the whole month.” - *Community member in LA*

“Some of the farmer’s market offer market match [where] you purchase \$20 and you get an additional \$20. It’s all about the affordability and accessibility. Gotta watch out for the minimarkets price gouging \$2-3 for a can of tuna.” - *Community organizer in LA*

“[SNAP] EBT was comfort when we were dealing with the medical bills and it really helped. It would be great if they can raise the amount so there’s actually enough, but it was areal help. I remember having to get over the stigma. I was in a movie theater and there was a PSA that came on and said how half of the people were working because growing up I didn't really experience that. I said to my husband we need to do this to help ourselves let’s get over any shame and EBT card is actually really nice but I think it would still be nice to have an increase. It helped my dad who’s disabled get some items. I just wish it could be a little but more substantial and now with inflation, you can buy less.” - *Community member in Arizona*

“I asked at my farmers market and was disappointed they didn't offer market match. I understand there’s a process.” - *College Health Nurse in CA*

“When I was volunteering as an AmeriCorps volunteer it was just a stipend program so I was able to qualify for EBT and that was a huge help with making it a livable experience. That AmeriCorps experience led to an employment opportunity which also led to a pay raise, however, I made just a little bit too much to qualify me and my family for the benefit so even though I got a pay raise, my actual total compensation was less because we receiving less support to no longer qualify. Gratefully for my daughters we were able to receive the WIC assistance and like I think everyone’s well aware, the healthy and nutritious food is often not the cheapest. The WIC program was very successful in being able to provide healthy and nutritious food for my daughters without necessarily breaking the bank. We didn't need to make some of those tough choices housing, medical expenses and food.

Working with the school distinct now it became very apparent how ma of our families struggled with food insecurity because when shelter in place happened and all the students were forced to stay home that number of how many were going hungry went from 1 to 4 to 1 to 2. It's s societal awareness that we are relying on schools to provide meals and sustainability to families with children. We’re back in school so we have free breakfast and lunch available for all students. I’ve been bringing in additional food resources to offset that’s because there are families that do qualify for CalFresh and WIC with the high cost of living, with inflation, with low wages they still don't have enough between those tough decisions and appropriate nutritious foods.

We have three different food distributions with different community partners each week and we serve over a couple of hundred people within the community and it’s still not enough to meet the need of the high cost, the low wages, and the food insecurity.” - *Community member in Oceanside*

“For my family, it's nutrition, the tough choices – am I going to buy something that’s healthy and nutritious or the box food that’s cheaper, like a box of hamburger helper or going to be able to cook a meal with fresh ingredients.” - *Anti-hunger worker with lived experience*

“Sometimes I have to take money from elsewhere in the budget to cover extra needed staples that are expensive at the grocery store. But there’s a decision how much am I going to be able to put on insert whatever bill here versus using it to buy food. - *Community member in Los Angeles*

A lot of choices I've been making lately is hitting the local food banks because I'm, a senior on SSI and they don't allot me that much money. I also get food stamps, they cut my food stamps. They were really low at first so I subsidized the food stamps by going to the food bank. It makes the choices better. I might hit two to three food banks and then the food stamps and then I don't have any cash for food. So it basically works out for me.

When I was younger we were on food stamps. It was not enough. My mom would make the spaghetti pink and as I grew up I understood why we didn't get the red sauce. Usually, we would get the leanest part of the meat when we ate meat but after that transferred to grains and herbs. What I found out as I was growing older was that sometimes people can go to the store when they are five days away from disposing of food and you can get that. You usually run out of food stamps before it's the end of the month. I try to buy things that stretch. I work with food banks and the community to gather food." - *Community member*

"Things are a little better now. What would surprise people is I manage my finances very well. I only get SSI. Until recently that has always been under \$1,000. When I have to travel a lot when I was in school and paid out of pocket for transit costs and everything because you can't always get discounted prices or relatives to drive you without having to pay for gas. I had to choose which meal was I going to eat. Was it going to be breakfast, lunch, or dinner because I could only afford to ration my groceries where I could have one meal and then some snacks versus three squared meals that your supposed to have." - *Community member in Los Angeles*

"A lot of college students don't have a lot of money, especially during school time. I know when I was in school we were only allotted so much money on your food card and then after that it was over and you had no money for food. I think a lot of our young people are really starving in school. We need food for them to learn. If your parents work through the day and only get a certain amount of money, there's no food in the house. A lot of kids that are at home don't get the food they need. At least when you were younger you could go to McDonald's'. [Now] you can't go to McDonald's, it costs \$20. It used to be a \$1 menu ain't no dollar menu no more. Even eating out at a fast food place is extremely expensive. I don't eat at McDonald's anymore. I can't afford it. That's a luxury right there. It's \$50 to get a meal for three people just for fries and a burger. That's ridiculous. If they cut food stamps even more, were not going to get three square meals. You might get enough for two weeks and then you have two weeks where and that's just for one person. That's why I have to go to food banks to add anything I can get or the 99-cent store is a great resource for food. It's been really tough for people to make it right now. Living in Southern California gas is \$7. We are choosing between gas and food." - *Community member in Los Angeles*

"Back in the late 60s, there were breakfast programs started and we would go around and collect from the stores that were in the community and get them to offer something back. That's what we would use to feed the kids at the beginning of the breakfast program. We found that children don't think well if they don't have breakfast and are not eating." - *Community member in Los Angeles*

I learned how to stretch [food stamps] but you don't get much. You have to find ways and it's not always consistent. Basically, it's meager. You don't get all the meats and cheese. You get the basics. You get what you need to stay alive so you're missing out on a lot of things. But we always tried to stretch nutrition no matter what you get. My son's favorite was pancakes, bacon and eggs from McDonald's. All of that's pricey now. I'm trying to learn how to grow but I can't indoors." - *Community member*

"I don't qualify for food stamps but I have months where I experience food insecurity not necessarily hunger. People Don't realize food insecurity is not only about being hungry, it's also not eating the right nutritious foods that your body needs. The example I made earlier, that is my reality this month. We have a food bank program here where employees can get food and I was blessed this month I was able to get a protein box and on the 4th of July we had spaghetti and yesterday we had a hamburger helper. It's like \$3 to get a two [hamburger helper] boxes and I already have turkey that was in the box. It really helped me get through the month because my rent this time around, inflation happened, it's \$500 more than it was. It was two increments. They raised it \$200 and within two months, it was raised an additional \$300. And probably next month it's going to be more because they can do that. The reality is people would probably look at me she's fine, they are ok, they have a job, and their working but the reality is we still experience food insecurity and we are not eligible for programs." - *Anti-hunger worker with lived experience*

I talk a lot about food stamps because I wasn't allowed to get them. I was on SSI. we protested for many years, Hunger Action LA went to Sacramento asking the legislators to give us food stamps. They finally did. Now they are trying to cut the money. Ok, I'll give you food stamps but now you want to cut my SSI for getting food stamps. How's that really helping me? Don't cut the money. I need the money too to live off. I barely get enough money to live and then I have no money for food. They give me a little money for food, not enough to survive off of. I still got to get out to hustle to different food banks and different food sources to get food. I'm not getting everything I need for good healthy meals. I've learned through different programs that I've joined over the years. It taught us how to make healthy meals on a budget. They should bring that back to families that were willing to learn, it was a Free government program we had chefs and nutritionists come in and would teach us different techniques on food and took us to the grocery stores and showing us how the groceries worked. A lot of people don't know how groceries work. I'm sure younger people who are not trained don't know how to buy healthy foods. I didn't know the differences between the lower isles next to the higher isles in the store. What do they put within eyesight. They will pay more to put their items in eyesight. You don't look to low or too high you look in the middle. Little things like that. Learning to stretch your food stamp budget or the money that you have. They should bring the program back. I was blessed to be in the program and learn these techniques. - *Community member in Los Angeles*

"I feel insulated in a way it comes off that we as disabled people, seniors or poor people are stupid. They are steadily decreasing food stamps on the EBT card. The prices don't just change for food once a year. You can't survive on our amount of income. They are still reducing the amount of money we are able to use for nutrition in a more sneaky way. If things were more

consistent, a set amount of grocery money per month and weren't going up and down making cuts. One month I got \$200 and the next month I got \$60. It doesn't make any sense. They need to be more straightforward and stop playing games. Poor people are not stupid." - *Community member in Los Angeles*

I remember starting the SSI program and food stamps were not part of it. Recently in 2020 they made me eligible and they gave me \$57. That took a lot of stretching. I like the idea of a program that teaches to buy for nutrition. The greatest thing is that [with] food stamps is with being able to go the farmers market and get seasonal vegetables and stretch your food. The way they manage food stamps with SSI has been a big problem." - *Community member*

"Vons is this chain. It's got good produce and good food, but it's one of the more expensive grocery stores. It seems to be that every poor neighborhood has a Vons within walking distance versus another store like a Food for Less or something that still has good quality food but less expensive. It's harder to stretch your dollars when you have the most expensive store near you and that's all you can get to. I think that what my community and other communities like it need are Vons replacements. Something that still has good healthy, good quality and produce options but not so expensive that it's taking a huge chunk out of your budget where you buy a few veggies and you haven't even gotten meat, spending over half of your money on your EBT card because of Vons pricing." - *Community member in Los Angeles*

"We need equity resources, whether housing equity, education equity, just equity all around. We can't solve hunger unless we are focused on those items too so that we can all have to sustain ourselves. When I think of a thriving community I think about equity for all." -*Anti-hunger worker with lived experience*

In our community, we need corner stores that have produce and some of them are but for the most part, are a little expensive. So you have to go to the chain stores. They are not close. They are always miles apart. Are you walking a good ten blocks or seven to get to a store that you can afford." - *Community member in Los Angeles*

"These [listening] sessions with leaders from departments of social services need to continue [after] in our community so they hear us." - *Community member*

"Demystifying the process of applying for food assistance and explaining how the income guides apply to them. The process of understanding if they are eligible turns people away because it is too difficult." - *Community member*

"According to the LA Times, half of all immigrants in California without legal status struggle with food insecurity. Due to legal, cultural, and linguistic differences, they [immigrants] lacked support from both government programs like food stamps and community networks in this country." - *Community member*

"Making the materials accessible in Spanish for people to be able to apply to these public benefits and not be excluded." - *Community member*

"[SNAP] application must be simpler and shorter, particularly because many parents rely on their children to help them apply."- *Community member*

"We need to better understand the immigrant community when applying for Cal fresh. Some of the questions on the application or a barrier like who is your sponsor?" - *Community member*

With the goal of ending hunger by 2030, people with lived experiences and staff working in anti-hunger work and advocates shared what they would need to thrive and be healthy:

- Based on what I'm hearing from the community and what would benefit my life in particular, medical catastrophes that are unplanned are huge barriers to our families so what I would love to see is Medicare expansion of the social security act as an exposure to COVID so all those that needed medical care could get it without the threat of bankruptcy or going hungry.
- I would also love to see it expanded from reactionary to preventive care, not only for our seniors and adults but also an investment in the health of our children.
- Wages increased by strengthening overtime protections. A lot of families are working multiple jobs and very hard in order to survive. Change to fair compensation so they can go from survival mode to thriving mode.
- Due to unforeseen circumstances, families had to drop out of higher education so I would like to see the cancellation of student loan debt.
- Lower drug prices
- Housing
- Child care
- Affordable attractive housing so everyone can have housing
- Prevention as opposed to corrective. Preventative measures being paid for like Food is Medicine and acupuncture as a preventive model that can get those services paid for.
- Based on White Houses' own reports in 2019 we had over half a million houseless Americans while we had over 17 million vacant homes. There's e no reason why large corporations need to be buying assets/investments in their portfolio while our open are in need. We have enough homes to give houseless individuals nine homes. That's an absurd discrepancy to me.
- The child tax credits were a huge benefit and lifeline to families. I would like to see them be made permanent so that families and children have all their basic needs taken care of.
- An investment in incentive with communities to have community gardens and donate that produce
- Restaurants and grocery stores have open pantries connected to the outside of the building for those that are able to collect the food that would otherwise go to waste and don't contribute to climate change.
- Increase awareness around CalFresh/SNAP for college students. If they have food and nutrition they will reach their potential.

- More hiring of SNAP support to reach into the community and educate what the program is and help people through the application process and is a safe process to go through.
- Preventive medicine and avoid spending millions to correct, to prevent diabetes, obesity, and mental health issues which are very costly.
- Teaching people how to cook and how to shop how to be selective about their foods
- Screening at school, and clinics across the board, really capture a lot of people you can help with a simple question screening.
- Listen directly to the needs and voices of communities. Ask, what does the community need and want?
- Aggressive climate action since climate change will cause severe food insecurity.
- Making sure legislative efforts that are being implemented around food assistance programs are taking into account lived experiences of immigrants.
- Provide food banks with more resources and funding so that the food they offer is more culturally significant to the communities they serve.
- One way the federal government can help communities is to send clear messages where services and benefits for [SNAP] CalFresh is no longer a public charge. This is necessary for the immigrant community.
- Continue hosting listening sessions beyond pre-conference time.