

# STUDENT FOOD INSECURITY: *An Unaddressed Public Health Concern*



**COLORADO**  
Department of  
Higher Education

Food insecurity, defined as “the condition of limited or uncertain access to food,” impacts more than 45% of college students in the U.S. A student’s job, expenses, social network, and financial resources all impact their access to food. When students are concerned about where their next meal is coming from, food insecurity can lead to a lower GPA, poor mental health and a limited social life. Yet, the full scope of the number of students impacted is relatively unknown, leading to student food

insecurity being an underrecognized issue with limited infrastructure to address it. This is a public health concern that requires us to go beyond just eliminating hunger, and ensure that all students have easy access to nutritious meals and the knowledge of the assistance services available to them. The Hunger Free Campus Checklist aims to address this complex issue through effective programs that focus on the intersectionality of student needs and backgrounds.



**HUNGER  
FREE  
CAMPUS**  
*Checklist*



## What is the Hunger Free Campus Checklist?

The Hunger Free Campus Checklist is a statewide initiative to address disparities in food insecurity on college campuses through program implementation and systems reform to ensure that all students in Colorado have the resources they need. The Checklist aims to create inclusive, student-focused programs that enhance existing campus resources to benefit both students and institutions of higher education.

## How was the Hunger Free Campus Checklist Created?

The Hunger Free Campus Checklist comes from the combined experience and knowledge of Colorado community leaders in food security outreach. Students and staff from college campuses, nonprofits and state agencies all played pivotal roles in providing feedback and suggestions to ensure that the checklist includes student-centered programs that met the capacity of schools. Through community convenings, survey results and national data, the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) was able to gain a better understanding of the needs of Colorado college students and the key health disparities that burden their ability to access healthy and affordable food.



# HUNGER FREE

## Campus Checklist

### Goals

The Hunger Free Campus Checklist aims to improve the health and academic success of students by ensuring that schools have the resources to:

- 1** Increase Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment for eligible students
- 2** Identify sustainable practices with an emphasis on inclusion and equity

- 3** Address student hunger
- 4** Raise awareness of the existing campus resources and services

### Programs



To meet checklist requirements schools will:

**IMPLEMENT THE FOUR CORE PROGRAMS.** The core programs have large support from schools and are designed to use the resources that many campuses already have.

**IMPLEMENT SIX FOCUSED INITIATIVES,** two in each of the three focus areas: awareness, access, and integration. The focused initiatives are designed to keep the recommended programs broad to give schools creativity and flexibility, but also have evidence-based programming that will specifically meet the needs of students.

*Innovation in Student Food Security:* To highlight the innovative and impactful programs schools already have, campuses are encouraged to work with CDHE to highlight these and may use them as one of the two required programs in each category.

### Core Programs *(Implement all four)*

#### ☐ **RUN A CAMPUS FOOD PANTRY**

Campus food pantries are a low-cost and direct method of improving student access to food. Food pantries can vary in size, selection of food, and method of delivery. Pantries are an effective way to connect students with campus life and community food security resources.

#### ☐ **PROVIDE SNAP ENROLLMENT ASSISTANCE**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is part of a federal nutrition program to help low-income households purchase food. It provides a monthly benefit that helps families and individuals buy the food they need for good health. Unfortunately, many students are not enrolled because they are unaware that they qualify, do not know how to enroll, or feel stigmatized when they use these services. Participating in SNAP outreach on campus to educate, pre-screen for eligibility, and assist students with applying increases program awareness and brings significant federal resources to students to support the purchase of nutritious foods.

#### ☐ **HOLD ONE AWARENESS EVENT EACH YEAR**

Many students are unaware that food insecurity is an issue for their peers and don't know that campus resources exist to help. By holding at least one annual student-centered event to bring awareness to hunger and food resources, campuses will connect students to services and reduce the stigma associated with seeking assistance.

#### ☐ **COLLECT AND REPORT ON STUDENT FOOD INSECURITY**

One of the key reasons that there are limited programs, funding and awareness for student hunger is because the actual number of college students struggling with food access is unknown. By collecting data on the scope of food insecurity on campus, institutions can both get an overview of the student needs on their campus and contribute to statewide statistics on food insecurity. Schools can conduct their own data collection or be a part of nationwide studies, such as the annual #RealCollege Survey, the country's largest assessment of student basic needs, conducted by the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.



# HUNGER FREE

## Campus Checklist

### Focused Initiatives

*Implement two programs in each of the focused initiatives*

#### ACCESS

These programs offer direct assistance accessing food.

- ☐ Increase the capacity of food pantries
- ☐ Provide a variety of meal plans, including an option that provides 10 or fewer meals weekly to avoid interfering with SNAP eligibility
- ☐ Create or implement meal sharing programs, such as the FeedShare app
- ☐ Plant and maintain campus community gardens
- ☐ Implement healthy and affordable vending machines
- ☐ Innovation in access

#### AWARENESS

These programs educate staff, faculty and students on hunger and the resources available to help.

- ☐ Educate student leaders on campus to create student-centered programs
- ☐ Change language to reduce stigma
- ☐ Provide an interactive food resource map
- ☐ Provide educational opportunities for students and staff
- ☐ Create an informational food security resource website
- ☐ Connect work study and financial aid recipients with SNAP outreach services and other food security support services on campus
- ☐ Participate in the #RealCollege Survey
- ☐ Innovation in awareness

#### INTEGRATION

These programs and services bring together different departments on campus to address a variety of barriers to basic needs that impact student food security.

- ☐ Make food pantries a hub for campus resources
- ☐ Pre-screen for SNAP eligibility and refer likely eligible students to application assistance during registration
- ☐ Partner with organizations that help with benefits screening
- ☐ Create a student organization to address food security
- ☐ Conduct regular staff meetings that focus on food security
- ☐ Innovation in integration





## Next Steps

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A HUNGER FREE CAMPUS?

By implementing programs that meet the checklist requirements, schools will provide a wide range of support services for students and be designated a Hunger Free Campus. This designation is a statewide recognition of the commitment the institution has in supporting the health and well-being of their students, and signifies that there is a collective effort across students, staff, faculty and community members to raise awareness and assistance for food insecurity.



*The Hunger Free Campus designation is a statewide recognition of the commitment the institution has in supporting the health and well-being of their students*

### EVALUATION

The Colorado Department of Higher Education will work closely with institutions of higher education to ensure that they can meet the requirements of the checklist while addressing the unique needs of their students with the resources they have. Once schools have the four Core Programs and six programs from the Focused Initiatives, schools can contact CDHE via this [link](#) to request this designation. CDHE will work with partner agencies and organizations to assess the submission and, after the programs are approved by CDHE, campuses will earn a Hunger Free Campus designation that will last one year (*at which point the IHE will reapply for the designation*).

Schools who have completed the four Core Programs and six programs from the Focused Initiatives, can request the Hunger Free Campus Designation [here](#).

### FROM CAMPUS TO COMMUNITY AND BEYOND

By supporting and working broadly to address the social determinants of student success and specifically a student's basic needs of food security, schools will be able to improve student achievement in the classroom, boost enrollment and retention, and increase professional growth. A Hunger Free Campus designation symbolizes a commitment to helping communities thrive, and brings to light a new meaning of what it means to support social determinants of student success.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[Connect here](#)

**Visit:** <https://highered.colorado.gov/social-determinants-of-student-success>

**Email:** Dr. Roberto Montoya at [Roberto.Montoya@dhe.state.co.us](mailto:Roberto.Montoya@dhe.state.co.us)



*Working together to support Colorado Institutions and students*



**COLORADO**  
Department of  
Higher Education

**HUNGER**  
FREE **COLORADO**

**YOUNG**   
**INVINCIBLES**

Special thanks to Kim Tolchinsky (MPH) for all her research on national best practices and support in facilitating stakeholder engagement/feedback which made this checklist possible.