

Stellar Group

Research | Strategy | Impact

Alaska SNAP-Ed

2023 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is the home agency for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed). SNAP-Ed is a federally authorized program that supports the health and food security of people who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) benefits or other means-tested federal assistance programs such as Medicaid or Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF), as well as individuals residing in communities with a significant low-income population. Typically, income eligibility for these programs is 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL).

The goal of SNAP-Ed is “to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) will make healthy food choices within a limited budget and choose physically active lifestyles consistent with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the USDA food guidance.”¹

SNAP-Ed is implemented through three approaches:

1. *Individual or group-based nutrition education, health promotion, and intervention strategies (required for all states)*
2. *Comprehensive, multi-level interventions at multiple complementary organizational and institutional levels*
3. *Community and public health approaches*

ALASKA SNAP-ED PROGRAM STRUCTURE

In Alaska, the SNAP-Ed program is located in the Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance as a part of Family Nutrition Programs (FNP). Consistent with federal SNAP-Ed goals, Alaska SNAP-Ed program has four goals:

1. *By 2023 the percentage of adults who consume the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables will increase by 2%.*
2. *By 2023 the percentage of youth who consume the recommended daily servings of fruit and vegetables will increase by 2%.*
3. *By 2023 the percentage of adults who meet CDC recommended levels of physical activity will increase by 2%.*
4. *By 2023 the percentage of adolescents who meet CDC recommended levels of physical activity will increase by 2%.*

Beyond meeting income eligibility requirements required by the program, the target audiences for Alaska SNAP-Ed are:

- » *Alaska Native people*
- » *Families with children*
- » *Youth*

As of SFY 2020, Alaska’s SNAP-Ed program has four grantees in several communities throughout the state:

- » *Municipality of Anchorage Health Department (AHD) - Anchorage*
- » *North Slope Borough Department of Health and Services (NSB) - Anatumuk Pass, Atqasuk, Utqiagvik, and Wainwright*
- » *Rural Alaska Community Action Program (RurAL CAP)- Gambell, Homer, Kodiak Savoonga*
- » *University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Services (UAF CES) - Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough*

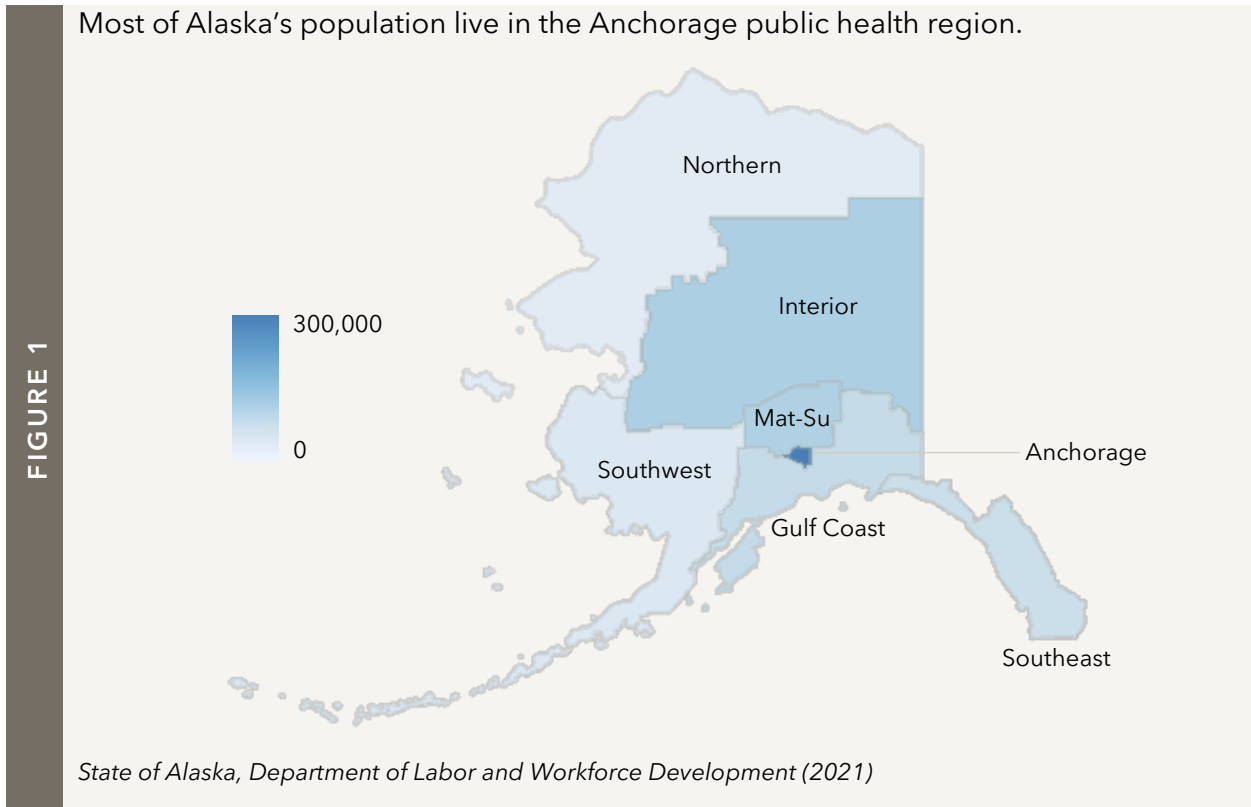
The State also has a social marketing campaign, Every Bite Counts, which aims to increase fruit and vegetable consumption by increasing knowledge of health benefits and shift attitudes about health food options, whether they are gathered, grown, or purchased. The campaign is implemented through several channels, including radio, television and online video streaming, and online still ads.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this needs assessment, the Stellar Group compiled and analyzed a combination of publicly available and specially requested secondary data on demographics and indicators related to SNAP-Ed’s target populations using descriptive statistics. Sources include the US Census Bureau, Alaska Department of Health population surveys and program data, US Department of Agriculture, and the Center for Disease Control. In addition, Stellar Group conducted interviews with nine professionals from nutrition and physical activity programs within Alaska in the fall of 2022. A full methodology is included as Appendix A.

KEY FINDINGS

This report explores demographic data, health indicators, and the Alaska food system in order to inform SNAP-Ed programming in the state. Overarchingly, findings demonstrate a continued need for improved fruit and vegetable consumption, as well as physical activity. Children and families as well as communities in the Southwest and Interior public health regions, are also shown to have high need. Public health regions are defined by the Alaska Department of Health (Alaska DOH) and are demonstrated in the figure below.



POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS

As of 2021, Alaska had a population of 734,323.² More than one-third (39%) of residents live in the Anchorage public health region, while the Northern public health region accounts for the smallest percentage of residents (4%). Fifty-nine percent of Alaska's population identify as White, followed Alaska Native/American Indian at sixteen percent. Other racial/ethnic groups account for less than 10% of the population.³

Poverty & Low-Income Status

Almost one-quarter of the population in Alaska lives at or below 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL), with a concentration in the Southwest and Interior regions of the state.⁴ All census areas with higher percentage of poverty are rural areas where services and economic opportunities are often limited. It is also important to note, however, that this level of data can obscure areas with high poverty that are within more densely populated urban areas such as Anchorage and Fairbanks. Rural communities often have small populations, and their geographic isolation increases costs for services and resources to be brought in from other areas of the state or the contiguous United States.

Eleven percent of Alaska's population lives below 100% FPL.⁵ Poverty rates at 125% FPL (the Alaska adjusted poverty threshold) are not available for different demographic groups. For this reason, 100% FPL is used. The likelihood of living in poverty is different across different

demographic groups. For example, Alaska Native/American Indian (AN/AI) and Black individuals are two to three times more likely to experience poverty than White and Asian individuals.

In Alaska, 10% of all families with children live below 100% FPL.⁶ However, unmarried female householders with children in the house are five times more likely to live below 100% FPL (25%) than their married-couple counterparts (5%). Half of key informants identified parents as a high need population for nutrition and physical activity education and policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) interventions. However, parents often have many competing priorities that limit their ability to give their time and attention to participating in additional activities. This is particularly true for low-income families.

Food Assistance Program Participation

In 2022, 51,737 households in Alaska were enrolled in SNAP (a household may include more than one enrolled individual). Despite an increase in enrollment in 2022, SNAP enrollment has decreased by 12% from 2018 to 2022.⁷ There is a concentration of enrollment in the Southwest and Interior public health regions. Similarly, enrollment in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children (WIC) decreased by 25% from 2018 to 2022.⁸

Although AN/AI individuals comprise just 16% of Alaska's total population, 40% of SNAP-enrolled individuals in 2022 identified as AN/AI.⁹ Twenty-nine percent of SNAP recipients identified as White, and 15% as more than one race. All other racial groups accounted for less than 10% of the total Alaska SNAP recipients. Youth (across all racial groups) are also more likely to be enrolled in SNAP than other age groups.

Thirty school districts in Alaska provide free or reduced-price lunch to 50% or more of students enrolled in the district.¹⁰ The majority of these districts are located in the Southwest and Interior regions of the state.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION STATUS

In 2021, over two-thirds of adults (68%) in Alaska were overweight or obese, mirroring national prevalence.¹¹ Alaskans living in the Mat-Su have the highest likelihood of being overweight/obese (71%), while the Southwest has a 10% lower prevalence (61%). Among adolescents, just under one-third (30%) are overweight/obese.¹²

In this same year, four in every five adults (79%) in Alaska participated in some form of physical activity outside work.¹³ There is little variation across racial/ethnic groups. Fewer (58%) met recommendations of at least 150 minutes of aerobic exercise per week.¹⁴

In Alaska, just one in four adults meet fruit consumption recommendations and just 15% are meeting vegetable consumption recommendations.¹⁵ There is little difference across

racial/ethnic groups or public health regions, though the Southwest region is less likely to report vegetable consumption than other regions of the state. Similar to adults, one-quarter of adolescents eat the recommended amount of fruit each day, while less than one-fifth eat recommended servings of vegetables.¹⁶

In 2021, 5% of adults in Alaska consumed three or more sugar-sweetened beverages a day.¹⁷ In the Northern Region, residents are nearly four times more likely to report this behavior than the statewide average. Eleven percent of AN/AI adults in Alaska consumed three or more sugar-sweetened beverages a day, around three times that of their peers.

ALASKA FOOD SYSTEM

In Alaska, 90-95% of all food is imported from outside the state, which increases risk to food security for residents.¹⁸ As of 2022, nearly one in five households in Alaska (19%) have recently experienced food insecurity, defined here as sometimes or often not having enough food to eat. Households with children are slightly more affected than those without children (26% vs 19%). While there is a higher number of residents in urban areas who are food insecure there is a higher prevalence in rural areas of the state.¹⁹

In Alaska, 33 of the state's 167 census tracts (20%) are considered food deserts, meaning there is a significant percentage of the population that is low-income and at least 33% have limited access to a grocery store or supermarket.²⁰ In four of the seven public health regions, at least one-quarter of its census tracts are considered food deserts. Further, the average cost of groceries in Alaska is 32% higher than the national average.²¹

Subsistence in Alaska is defined by the federal Bureau of Land Management as the customary and traditional uses by rural Alaska residents of wild, renewable resources for personal and familial consumption, trade or barter, or for making and selling of handicraft articles.²²

Subsistence accounts for a significant portion of Alaska residents' diets. In rural areas in Alaska, an estimated 37 million pounds of wild foods are harvested each year.²³ In non-subsistence areas, an additional 13 million pounds of wild foods are harvested annually.²⁴

Acceptance of SNAP benefits at farmers markets is one way to increase access to healthy foods, particularly fruits and vegetables among recipients. It also can support local food systems and economies by adding to farmers' income sources. As of November 2022, just five farmers markets and one vendor in the state of Alaska were authorized to accept SNAP benefits out of a total of 44 markets across the state.^{25,26} Three are located in Anchorage or Fairbanks, while the remaining three are in Haines, Homer, and Sitka.

As of 2019, 24 school food authorities (SFAs) are participating in farm to school programs, and nine are not.²⁷ Thirteen of the participating SFAs include a food, nutrition, or agricultural education component to their program such as farmer visits, educational edible gardens, and farm field trips.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from this needs assessment demonstrate a continued need for interventions in the areas that the current SNAP-Ed program has focused on, such as fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity. Alaska's large geography and low population density, as well as the high costs of providing services present additional challenges. It is not feasible to physically serve all communities in the state with the limited resources available. The diversity of Alaska's population is both a strength and a challenge. This points to the continued need for more partnerships to develop culturally relevant approaches and resources specifically for different populations. Social marketing is an important part of reaching people across Alaska in a cost-effective way.

These recommendations are designed to help Alaska's SNAP-Ed program build off what is working well, and better align with where there is energy and momentum with current and potential partners in the state. It is not a comprehensive list of possible approaches to meet all identified needs. These recommendations are also mutually reinforcing. While each of them stands alone, together they encourage a more robust, focused program that still allows for a high degree of local adaptation.

RECOMMENDATION 1: *Continue the two-generation approach*

There is significant need for services among both youth and adults, and many health indicators have not improved in recent years. By working with children and their caregivers, both populations can be served and there is a synergistic effect by the two supporting and teaching one another. Children can also be more easily reached because they frequent specific locations such as schools and out-of-school programs, and they are at a phase in their life where they learn new skills and knowledge that can impact their behaviors for the rest of their lives. Adults also purchase and prepare most of the foods that children eat at home. As their children's first teacher, they are essential partners.

RECOMMENDATION 2: *Continue focus on increasing fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity*

Alaska SNAP-Ed's current goals focus on increasing fruit and vegetable consumption as well as increasing physical activity levels. These goals were identified based on findings from the 2018 Needs Assessment. However, fruit and vegetable consumption and rates of physical activity continue to be low among Alaskans, both youth and adults. It would therefore be beneficial for the SNAP-Ed program to sustain its efforts which are just now bearing fruit. The Alaska SNAP-Ed social marketing campaign has had high levels of engagement and has potential to continue to deepen its impact and diversify its messaging for different target audiences. There are also opportunities to align and build physical activity promotion off the state's other long-running social marketing campaign for children and families, "Play Every Day", which is led by the Alaska DOH Division of Public Health.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Strengthen cultural relevancy of program services

Alaska faces a unique challenge in providing SNAP-Ed services that are culturally and locally relevant to target audiences. Areas with the highest need are often rural and have higher Alaska Native populations. The curricula and toolkits available through the SNAP-Ed Toolkit often rely on typical grocery store produce and set-ups and other resources more commonly found in urban and suburban locations. In FY 2018 Alaska SNAP-Ed worked with the Center for Alaska Native Health Research to develop six [mini-magazines](#) that emphasize subsistence foods of various tundra plants found in the Southwest region of the state. The mini-magazines that can be used as educational materials for SNAP-Ed participants. SNAP-Ed would benefit by building on this work to further create Alaska-based programming and/or support grantees and other partners to continue to do so. There is also a need for cultural relevancy for other communities in Alaska such as Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders who may have different language preferences, dietary practices, and could also benefit from learning about local foods through targeted, specific outreach and/or partnerships to create appropriate educational resources.

Cultural relevancy of programming can be done by working with organizations (either a grantee or contracted firm) to develop and pilot Alaska-based direct education curricula or other educational materials. By increasing the cultural relevancy of program services, SNAP-Ed can increase buy-in from community members and have more positive and stronger impacts for the target audience. This also helps to embrace the cultures of those served rather than enforce Western ideals and beliefs onto participants.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Incorporate efforts to address food security

Food security is a concern among many residents throughout the state, both in terms of availability and affordability. With growing inflation, the need to address food security, including food resource management, is mounting. Currently, the Alaska Food Policy Council has a plan to address food security concerns which includes many diverse partners across the state. The SNAP-Ed program could support these efforts and build on the momentum of complementary work of other organizations by focusing efforts on food security. The work done by the Food Policy Council may also open the door to partnership opportunities to further increase impact.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is the home agency for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed). SNAP-Ed is a federally authorized program that supports the health and food security of people who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) benefits or other means-tested federal assistance programs such as Medicaid or Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF), as well as individuals residing in communities with a significant low-income population.

The goal of SNAP-Ed is “to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will make healthy food choices within a limited budget and choose physically active lifestyles consistent with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the USDA food guidance.”²⁸

Every state and territory receives funding for SNAP-Ed services annually. Funding is based on the state’s share of SNAP expenditures and the level of SNAP participation in the state. Each state is required to include two or more of the following approaches to delivering evidence-based nutrition education and obesity prevention activities:

APPROACH ONE: Individual or group-based nutrition education, health promotion, and intervention strategies. Approach One activities are required of all SNAP-Ed programs. These activities must be evidence-based and be combined with activities in Approach Two and/or Approach Three.

APPROACH TWO: Comprehensive, multi-level interventions at multiple complementary organizational and institutional levels. Activities in approach two may address several or all elements of the social-ecological model and should be mutually reinforcing. A key part of multi-level interventions is that they reach the same target audience at more than one level of the SEM.

APPROACH THREE: Community and public health approaches. These are targeted to a large segment of the population rather than just individuals or small groups.

Social marketing can be a part of Approach Two or Approach Three depending on how the intervention is structured. States have wide latitude in how SNAP-Ed programming is delivered and most State Agencies manage a variety of partnerships, contracts and subawards with local and statewide agencies to deliver services directly to their selected target audiences. Each state must complete a needs assessment every three years to identify target populations and set goals and priorities.

ALASKA SNAP-ED PROGRAM STRUCTURE

In Alaska, the SNAP-Ed program is located in the State of Alaska Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance as a part of Family Nutrition Programs (FNP). Consistent with federal SNAP-Ed goals, Alaska SNAP-Ed program has four goals:

1. *By 2023 the percentage of adults who consume the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables will increase by 2%.*
Baseline 2019 rate: 8.3% (BRFSS)
2. *By 2023 the percentage of youth who consume the recommended daily servings of fruit and vegetables will increase by 2%.*
Baseline 2019 rate: 9.5% (YRBS)
3. *By 2023 the percentage of adults who meet CDC recommended levels of physical activity will increase by 2%.*
Baseline 2019 rate: 25.9% (BRFSS)
4. *By 2023 the percentage of adolescents who meet CDC recommended levels of physical activity will increase by 2%.*
Baseline 2019 rate: 14.5% (YRBS)

Beyond meeting income eligibility requirements required by the program, the target audiences for Alaska SNAP-Ed are:

- » *Alaska Native people*
- » *Families with children*
- » *Youth*

Currently, Alaska SNAP-Ed activities are conducted through implementing agencies (referred to as grantees) that were selected through a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process. All grantees conduct direct education from Approach One combined with activities from Approaches Two and Three focused on one or more of these five state strategies:

STRATEGY ONE: Create, enhance, and support implementation and evaluation of strong wellness policies and practices in eligible schools and out of school time programs to promote healthy eating and physical activity.

STRATEGY TWO: Support the development and implementation of Farm to School and Farm to Summer Meal projects, including gardens.

STRATEGY THREE: Support the implementation and promotion of Summer Food Service Program Sites.

STRATEGY FOUR: Support the development and implementation of Healthy Retail practices and policies in food pantries, food banks, convenience stores, and grocery stores.

STRATEGY FIVE: Expand the number of retail stores and Farmers Markets accepting SNAP EBT and support efforts to increase access and awareness in the target audience.

Currently, Alaska’s SNAP-Ed program has four grantees, several of whom work in multiple communities across the state:

- » Municipality of Anchorage Health Department (MOA DOH)
- » North Slope Borough Department of Health and Services (NSB)
- » Rural Alaska Community Action Program (RurAL CAP)
- » University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Services (UAF CES)



The four grantees engage in various education and policy, systems, and environment (PSE) intervention activities.

- » **MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH** provides direct education at Covenant House youth homeless shelter and Akeela recovery center. AHD also works with a local grocery store, Red Apple Market in Anchorage’s Mountain View neighborhood, to create environmental changes that support healthy food purchases, and works to increase the number of farmers markets who accept SNAP benefits in the community.
- » **NORTH SLOPE BOROUGH** provides direct education to school-aged youth and works with the local school district to improve wellness practices in Anaktuvuk Pass, Atqasuk, Utqiagvik, and Wainwright.

- » **RURAL ALASKA COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM** works in four Head Start locations in Gambell, Homer, Kodiak, and Nome. Nutrition education centers around hydroponic gardens that were installed as part of the program, as well as parent education during Family Night events. RurAL CAP also works with participating sites to improve physical activity environments for children who attend.
- » **UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICES** works with schools in the Mat-Su valley to provide direct education in elementary school and also works to create PSE changes to improve school wellness policies and environments. In addition, UAF CES works with the local food bank to support access to healthy food for patrons.

SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

In addition to projects implemented by grantees, the State has a social marketing campaign to improve fruit and vegetable consumption. The campaign was statewide, with a primary audience of Alaska Native people. The secondary audience is families with children (of any race). While both rural and urban communities will be targeted, there is slightly more focus on rural communities where there is a greater identified need. This campaign began in state fiscal year 2019 and has continued through fiscal year 2023.

The social marketing campaign, Every Bite Counts, has four goals:

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

The Every Bite Counts campaign is implemented through ads on Facebook, YouTube, public television, public radio, online video streaming, and digital/mobile ads. Grantees also support the campaign by sharing campaign posts on their own program social media pages and distributing nutrition reinforcement items with the campaign slogan and logo to SNAP-Ed participants.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The State of Alaska Department of Health (Alaska DOH) Family Nutrition Programs (FNP) office commissioned a needs assessment for SNAP-Ed to better understand the health, nutrition, and physical activity status of low-income families and individuals in Alaska.

In line with the updated FY2023 SNAP-Ed plan guidance, the current needs assessment:

- » *Presents the nutrition and physical activity, key demographic characteristics, and barriers to accessing healthy foods and SNAP-Ed programming*
- » *Considers the diverse characteristics of the target populations*
- » *Presents areas for improvement with regard to SNAP-Ed access and appropriateness for the target audiences, collaborations and partnerships with other organizations, and capacity of the SNAP-Ed workforce to deliver programming that fits within Alaska's SNAP-Ed delivery model*

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this needs assessment, the Stellar Group compiled and analyzed a combination of publicly available and specially requested secondary data on demographics and indicators related to SNAP-Ed's target populations using descriptive statistics. Sources include the US Census Bureau, Alaska Department of Health population surveys and program data, US Department of Agriculture, and the Center for Disease Control. In addition, Stellar Group conducted interviews with nine professionals from nutrition and physical activity programs within Alaska in fall of 2022. A full methodology is included as Appendix A.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND PUBLIC BENEFITS USAGE

This section explores the attributes of SNAP-Ed eligible populations across Alaska through select demographic indicators as well as enrollment data from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children (WIC). It consists of the following subsections:

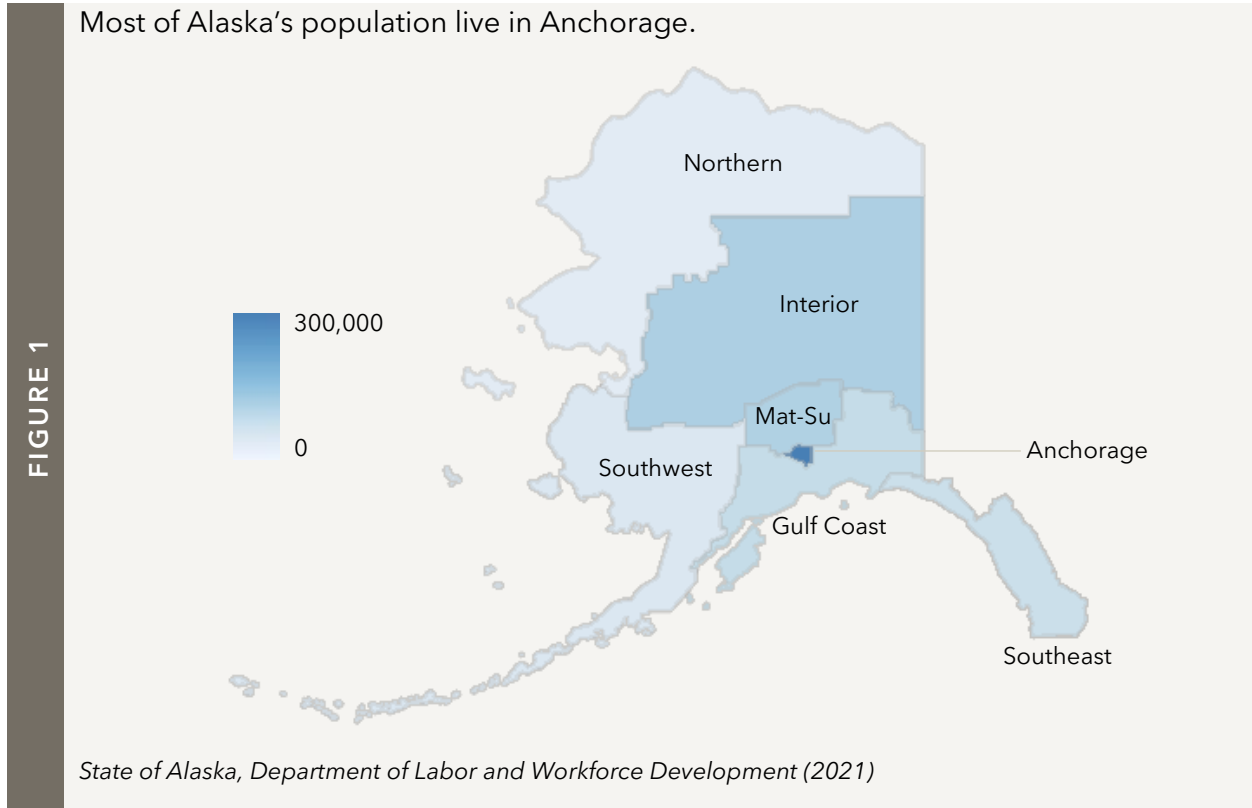
- » *Population*
- » *Poverty & Low-Income Status*
- » *SNAP Usage*
- » *WIC Usage*

POPULATION

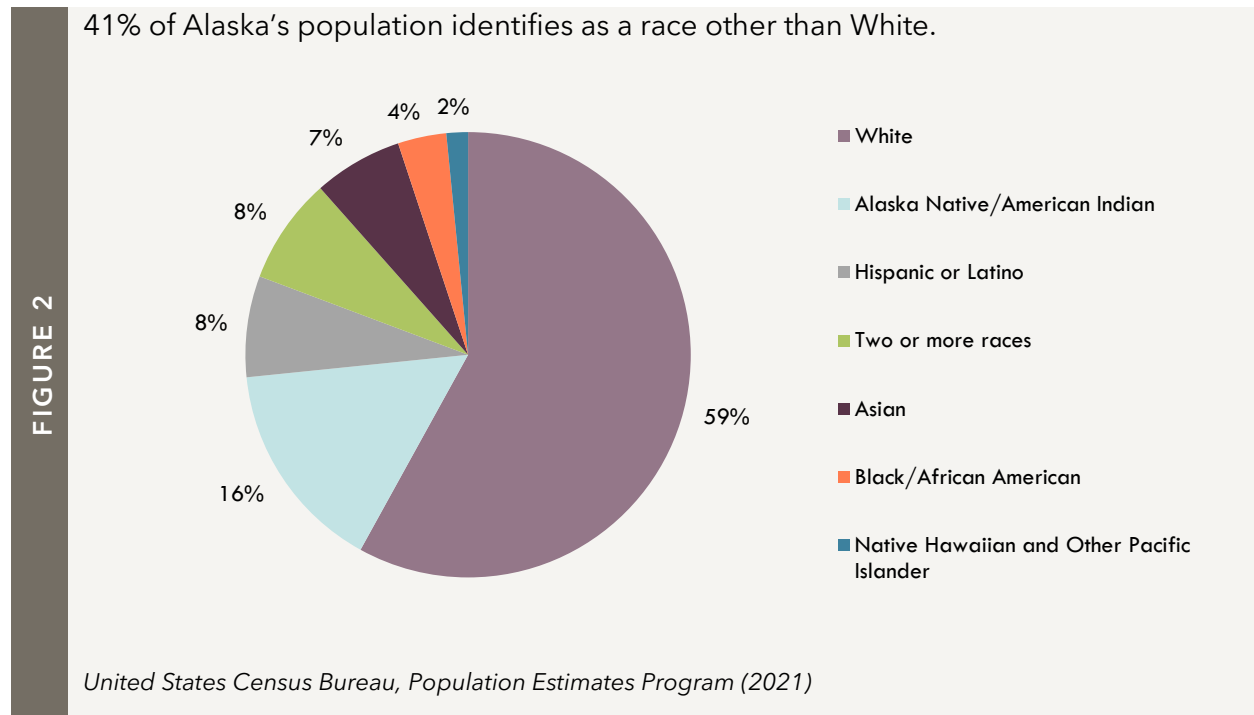
As of 2021, Alaska had a population of 734,323.²⁹ Its residents live throughout thirty boroughs/census areas, which are combined into seven public health regions. The population of each public health region, as well as a list of boroughs/census areas in each region, is listed in the following table.

TABLE 1: ALASKA PUBLIC HEALTH REGIONS		
Public Health Region	Borough/Census Areas in PH Region	Population
Anchorage	Anchorage	289,697
Gulf Coast	Chugach, Copper River, Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak Island	81,492
Interior	Denali, Fairbanks North Star, Southeast Fairbanks, Yukon-Koyukuk	111,306
Mat-Su	Matanuska-Susitna	108,805
Northern	Nome, North Slope, Northwest Arctic	28,261
Southeast	Haines, Hoonah-Angoon, Juneau, Ketchikan, Petersburg, Prince of Wales-Hyder, Sitka, Skagway, Wrangell, Yakutat	72,494
Southwest	Aleutians East, Aleutians West, Bethel, Bristol Bay, Dillingham, Kusilvak, Lake and Peninsula	42,268
<i>State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development (2021)</i>		

The following map illustrates the location of Alaska’s public health regions, as well as the population of each public health region; a darker shade indicates a higher population. Anchorage has the largest population, followed by the Interior and the Mat-Su. More than half of the state’s population lives in Anchorage/Mat-Su area. Rural regions are less densely populated.



Fifty-nine percent of Alaska’s population identify as White, followed by Alaska Native/American Indian at sixteen percent. Other racial/ethnic groups account for less than 10% of the population.



POVERTY & LOW-INCOME STATUS

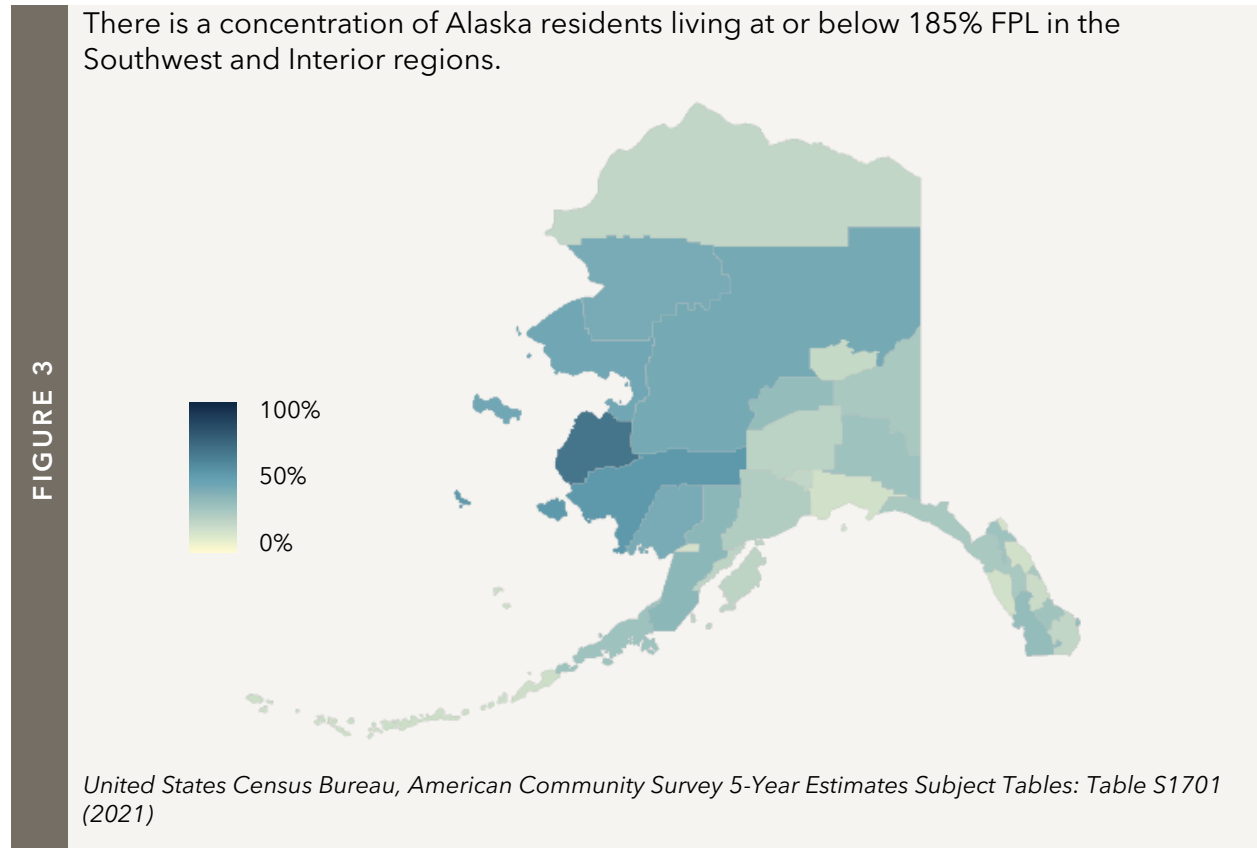
Alaska has an adjusted poverty threshold equaling 125% of the federal poverty level (FPL) that is used in the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia.* For example, 100% poverty for a household of one in Alaska is \$16,990, compared to \$13,590 for other states.³⁰ For a household of three, 100% poverty in Alaska is \$28,790, compared to \$23,030 for other states. The U.S. Census and American Community Survey estimates for poverty rates in Alaska do not take the adjusted poverty threshold into account for Alaska when completing national rankings or calculating poverty levels in Alaska.

The broader indicator of 185% FPL is often used to determine eligibility for federal assistance programs for low-income individuals and families including Head Start, SNAP, the National School Lunch Program, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, WIC, and the Children’s Health Insurance Program.³¹

In Alaska, almost one-quarter (22%) of the population lives at or below 185% FPL.³² As illustrated in the map below, there is a concentration of low-income residents (at or below 185% FPL) in the Southwest and Interior regions of the state as of 2021.

* Hawaii also has an adjusted federal poverty level.

In two boroughs/census areas, 50% or more of the population lives at or below 185% FPL, and in an additional 15 boroughs/census areas, between 25% and 49% of the population lives at or below 185% FPL.



All census areas with higher percentage of poverty are rural areas where services and economic opportunities are often limited. It is also important to note, however, that this level of data can obscure areas with high poverty that are within more densely populated urban areas such as Anchorage or Fairbanks.

TABLE 2: CENSUS AREAS WITH 25% OR MORE LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS

Census Area	% of population at or below 185% FPL	Total population
Kusilvak	67%	8,354
Bethel	52%	18,514
Nome	45%	10,070
Yukon/Koyukuk	44%	5,433
Northwest Arctic	43%	7,776
Dillingham	43%	4,899
Lake and Peninsula	37%	986
Denali	34%	2,187
Prince of Wales	34%	5,886
Aleutians East	31%	3,409
Copper River	31%	2,635
Haines	31%	2,098
Wrangell	30%	2,162
Hoonah-Angoon	28%	2,327
Southeast Fairbanks	28%	6,849
Yakutat	28%	697
Kenai Peninsula	25%	58,711

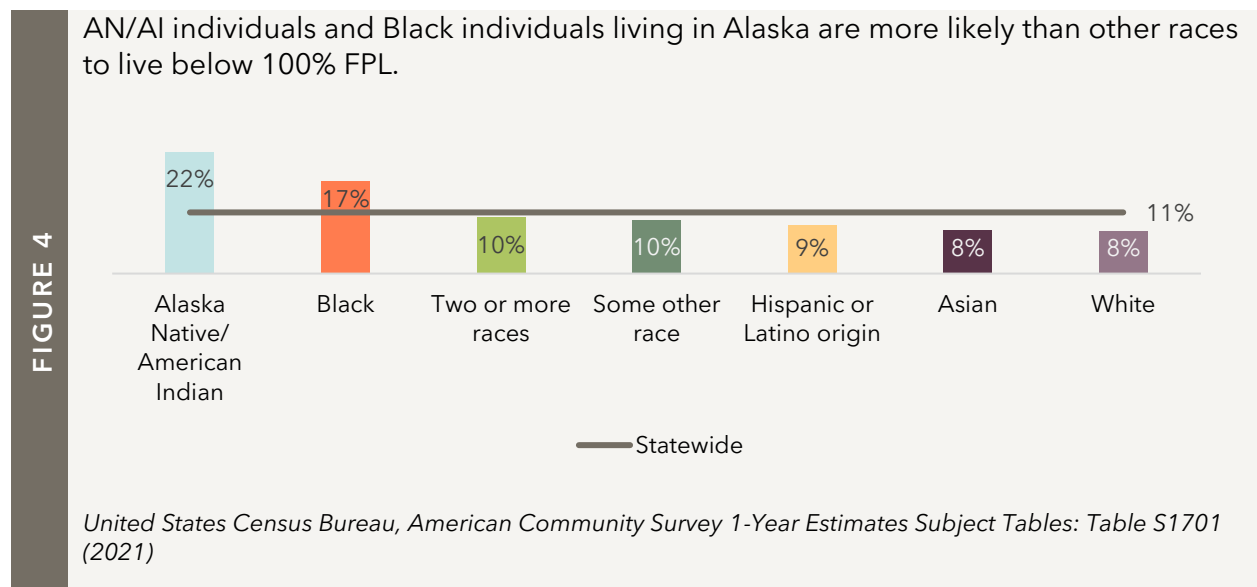
United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables: Table S1701 and Table S0601 (2021)

During key informant interviews, two individuals identified rural communities as having high need for nutrition and physical activity education and policy, systems, and environment (PSE) interventions. They also spoke to the geographic challenge of providing such services in an effective and efficient manner. Rural communities often have small populations, and their geographic isolation increases cost for services and resources to be brought in from other areas of the state.

One key informant also noted that while there are challenges in serving these communities, there is also often less focus on overcoming existing barriers to meet needs in these communities than in urban ones. *"I think there are some systemic issues with how we deliver services in our state. There does need to be a bit more concentration on rural areas of Alaska."* Another key informant noted that several grant programs serving these areas focus on PSE interventions and social marketing campaigns to increase reach and impact, as opposed to hosting individual or community events, which can be more difficult and less efficient means of achieving desired outcomes.

"Communities off the road system don't have the same resources, and if they do, they are often more expensive because of the cost of transporting goods and foods to those areas... When you're talking produce, produce can go bad if you wait too long." - Key informant

Eleven percent of Alaska’s population lives below 100% FPL.³³ However, the likelihood of living in poverty is different across different demographic groups.[†] In Alaska, Alaska Native/American Indian (AN/AI) and Black residents are more likely than other races or ethnic groups to experience poverty. For example, AN/AI and Black individuals are two to three times more likely to experience poverty than White and Asian individuals. It should be noted this data is not adjusted for Alaska poverty guidelines and does not give a full picture of the SNAP-eligible prevalence (185% FPL) among racial/ethnic communities and therefore is a low estimate.



[†] Poverty rates at 125% (the Alaska adjusted poverty threshold) are not available for different demographic groups. For this reason, 100% FPL is used.

Twelve percent of children in Alaska and 9% of seniors (individuals aged 65 and older) live below 100% FPL.³⁴ In Alaska, 10% of all families with children live below 100% FPL.³⁵ However, female householders with children in the house are five times more likely to live below 100% FPL (25%) than their married-couple counterparts (5%).

During key informant interviews, half (n=4) identified parents as a high need population for nutrition and physical activity education and PSE interventions. Support for parents also impacts children and youth, a two-generation impact. However, these individuals also noted that parents often have many competing priorities that limit their ability to give their time and attention to participating in additional activities. This is particularly true for low-income families. As one person explained, *“I think we’ve got a lot of people who are trying to get clothes or housing.... just trying to get something on the plate.”* Some also spoke of the high cost of food as well as the limited time parents have to engage in optional programs such as nutrition education.

SNAP PARTICIPATION

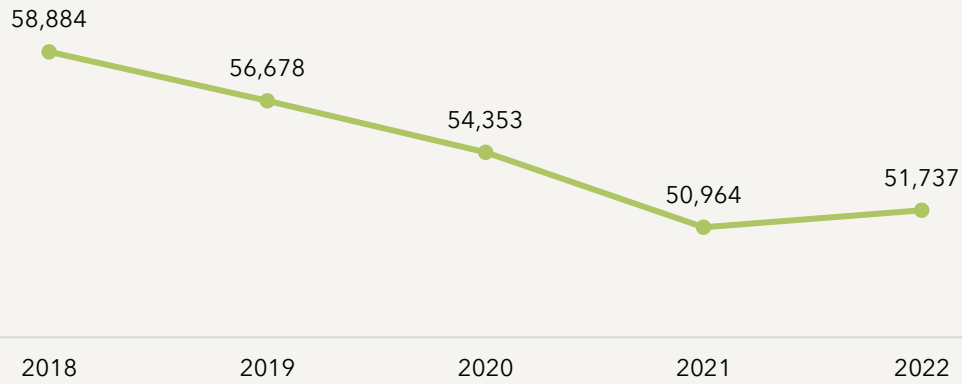
Households with gross incomes at or below 130% FPL and net incomes at or below 100% FPL are eligible to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.³⁶ They must also be working or enrolled in an employment training program. These benefits may be used to purchase food at eligible grocery stores and farmers markets. Additionally, SNAP recipients in certain areas of Alaska may use SNAP benefits to purchase hunting or fishing equipment for subsistence activities, an important source of food in many Alaskan communities.³⁷ Subsistence in Alaska is discussed in further detail on page 30.

In response to impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, the USDA issued Emergency Allotments to SNAP recipients starting in March 2020.³⁸ These allotments were an amount equal to the maximum benefit for the household size, minus their monthly base benefit. Alaska received these additional funds through August of 2022 at which point 38,000 households were receiving a combined total of \$9,037,500 in emergency allotments.

In 2022, 51,737 households in Alaska were enrolled in SNAP (a household may include more than one enrolled individual). Despite an increase in enrollment in 2022, **SNAP enrollment has decreased by 12% from 2018 to 2022.**³⁹ In recent years, the State has had significant delays in processing SNAP applications as well as distributing SNAP allotments to participants. This impacts eligible individuals’ ability to sign up or get recertified for a needed service, and may discourage them from trying to enroll, which may contribute to this recent decline in enrollment. For example, as of January 2023, the State was still working through recertification applications from October 2022.⁴⁰

FIGURE 5

The total number of households enrolled in SNAP has decreased from 2018 to 2022.



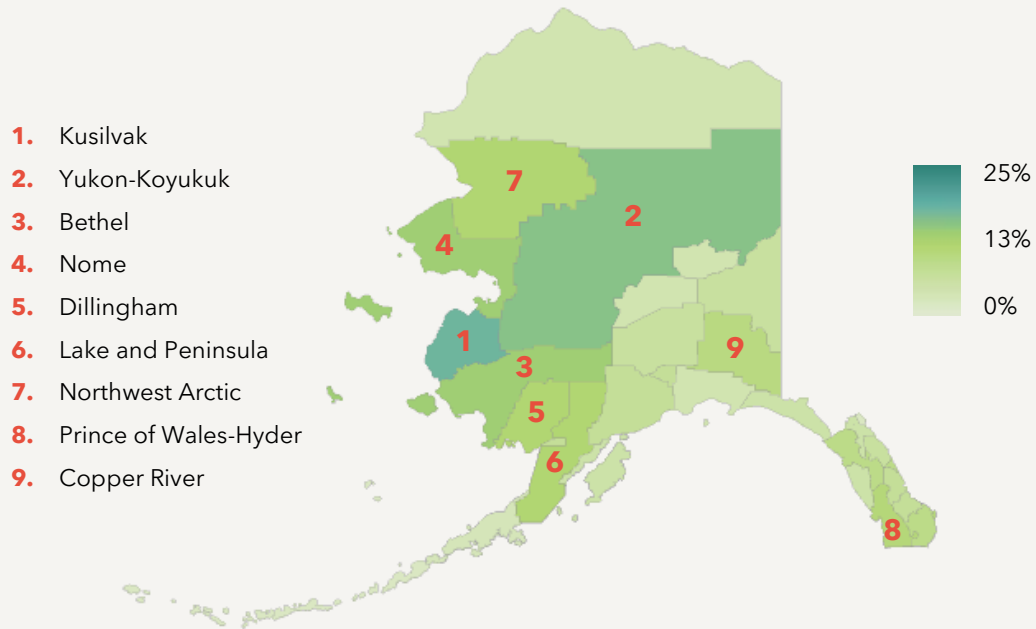
State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance (2018-2022)

In fiscal year 2022, 15% of individuals living in Alaska were enrolled in SNAP at some point in time, although total enrollment per state fiscal year vary widely between boroughs/census areas from less than 2% to almost 20% of individuals.^{41,42} As illustrated in the following map, 10% or more of the population in nine boroughs/census areas were enrolled in SNAP at some point within the state fiscal year, with a concentration in the Southwest and Interior regions:

1. Kusilvak (18%)
2. Yukon-Koyukuk (16%)
3. Bethel (14%)
4. Nome (14%)
5. Dillingham (12%)
6. Lake and Peninsula (12%)
7. Northwest Arctic (12%)
8. Prince of Wales-Hyder (11%)
9. Copper River (10%)

Individuals in boroughs/census areas in the Southwest and Interior regions were most likely to be enrolled in SNAP in fiscal year 2022.

FIGURE 6



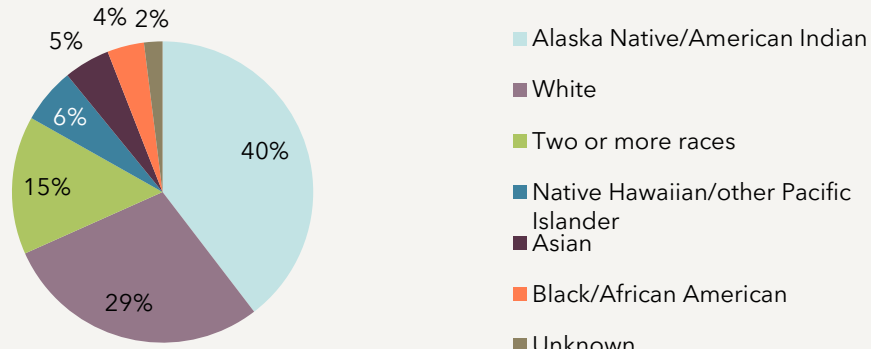
State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance (2022); State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development (2021)

Although AN/AI individuals comprise just 16% of Alaska’s total population, 40% of SNAP-enrolled individuals in 2022 identified as AN/AI.⁴³ The high rate of AN/AI people enrolled in SNAP points to a need for culturally relevant SNAP-Ed programming for this population.

The importance of taking historical trauma and culture into account and having nutrition educators who are knowledgeable on this topic was also mentioned by one key informant. They discussed the importance of understanding that many health issues, including nutritional health, are rooted in this history and related social determinants of health such as Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs). Further, teaching and perpetuating traditional food and physical activity knowledge and practices is demonstrated to have positive health impacts on native participants.⁴⁴ Another key informant noted a need for SNAP-ed materials that are culturally relevant for Alaska Native culture, noting that there are currently no USDA-approved SNAP-Ed curricula that are specific to this demographic.

FIGURE 7

40% of individuals enrolled in SNAP in Alaska in fiscal year 2022 identify as Alaska Native/ American Indian.

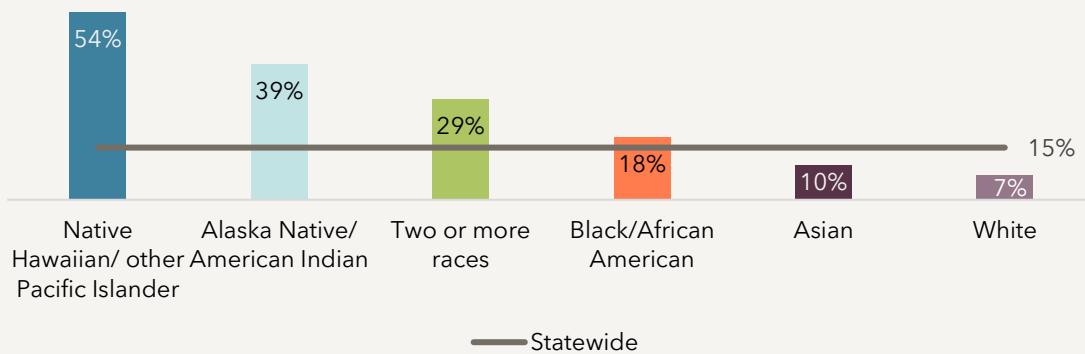


State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance (2022)

Examining SNAP enrollment among total statewide racial populations also provides useful information about the different levels of need across the state. In 2022, individuals who identified as Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander had the highest likelihood of being enrolled in SNAP. However, due to a relatively small Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander population in Alaska (illustrated in Figure 2 on page 8), this should be interpreted with caution. AN/AI individuals also had high enrollment, as well as individuals of two or more races. Asian and White individuals are least likely to be enrolled.

FIGURE 8

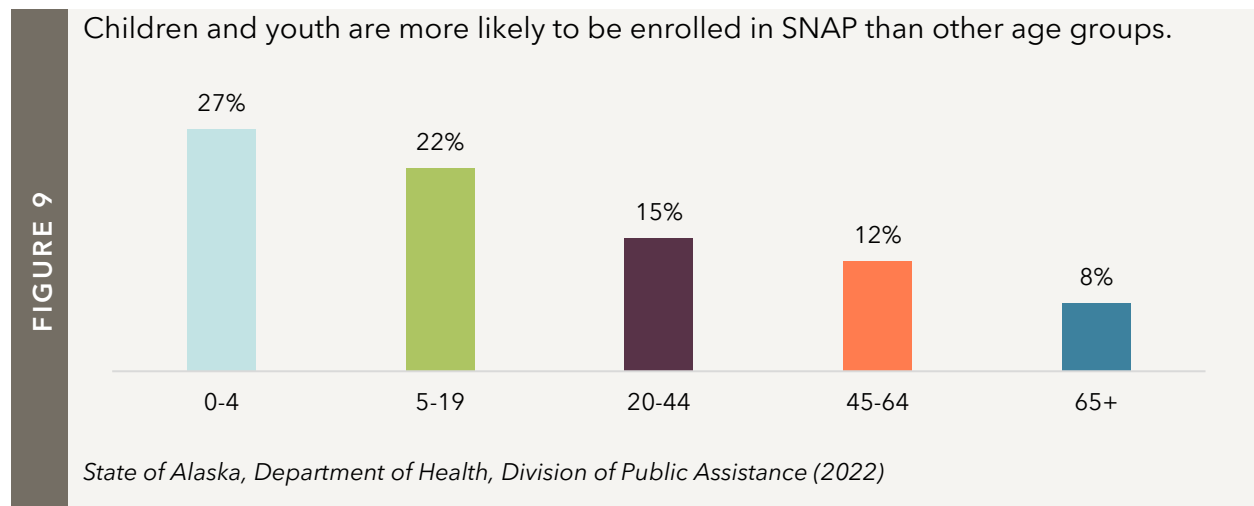
In fiscal year 2022, more than half of Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander residents and over one-third of AN/AI residents were enrolled in SNAP.



State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance (2022); State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development (2021)

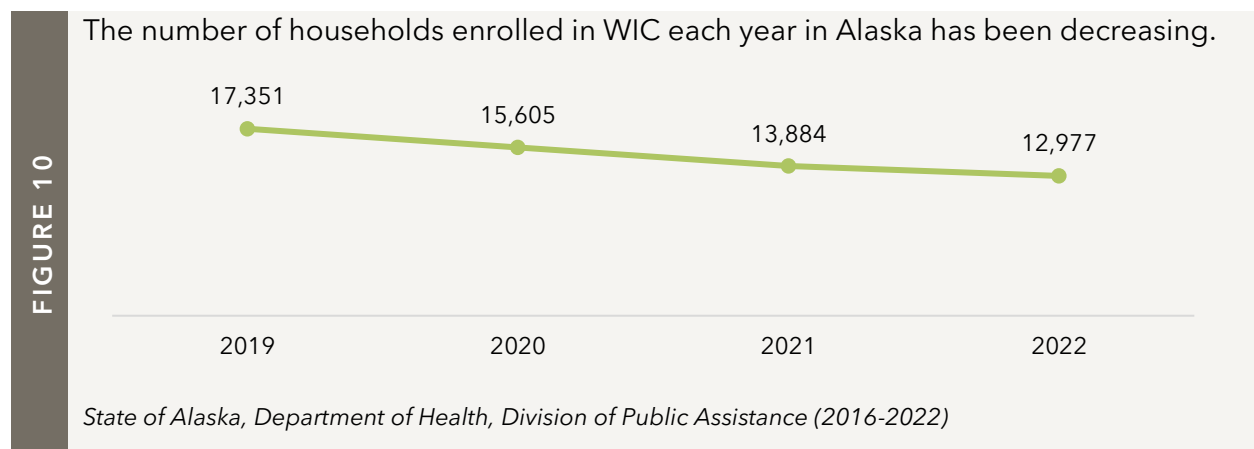
The younger someone is, the more likely they are to be enrolled in SNAP. For example, just over one-quarter (27%) of children living in Alaska under the age of five are enrolled in

SNAP compared to just 8% of seniors. Further, children comprise 39% of SNAP recipients, with 28% being school-aged (defined here as ages 5-18).⁴⁵



WIC PARTICIPATION

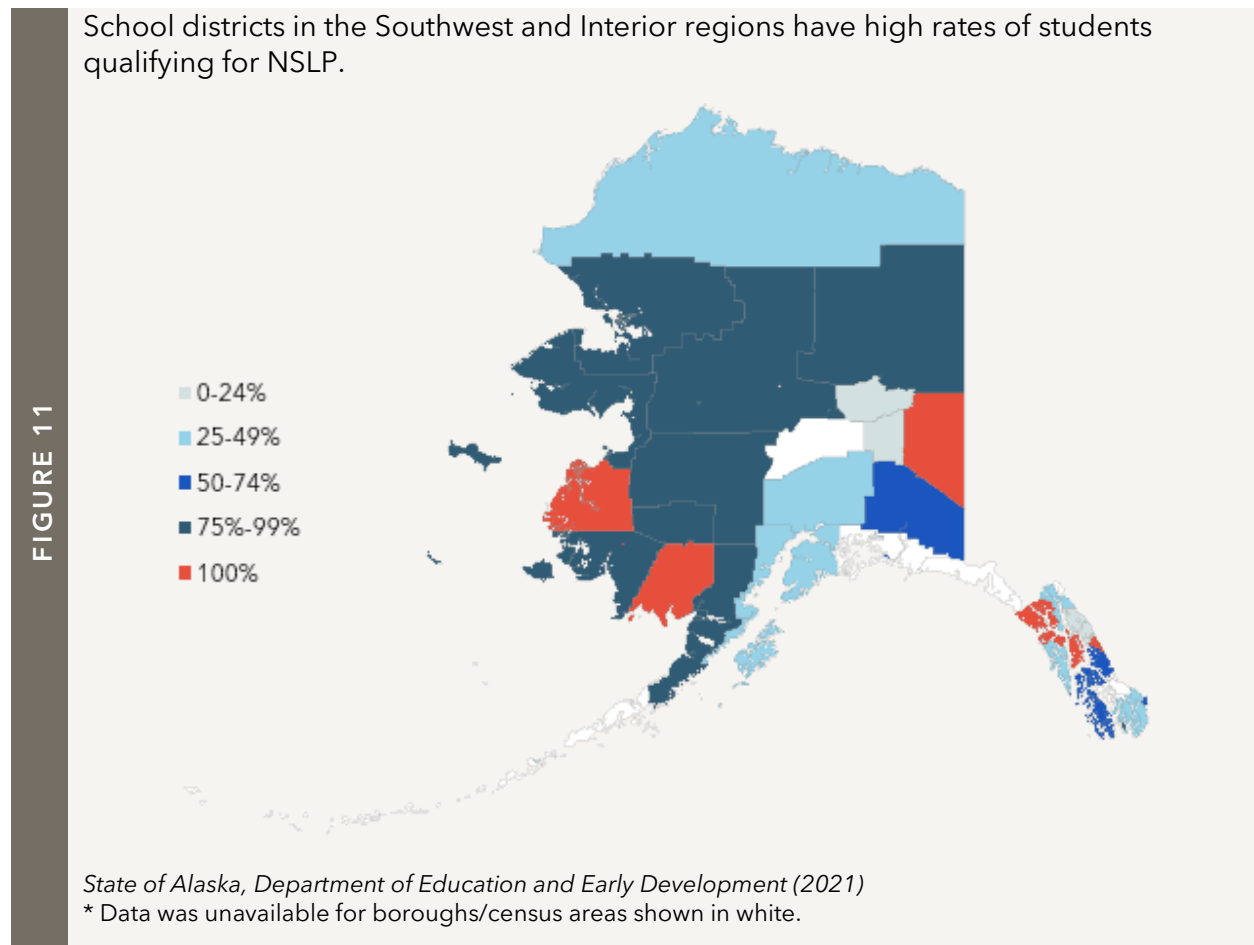
WIC provides supplemental food benefits, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and for infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.⁴⁶ To be eligible for WIC in Alaska, applicants must be living at or below 185% FPL.^{47,48} Similar to SNAP enrollment, **total annual WIC enrollment has been decreasing in recent years**, from 17,351 households in 2019 to 12,977 in 2022, a 25% decrease.⁴⁹ Nationally, there was a 10% decline in enrollment from 2018 to 2020.⁵⁰



NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Across the United States, the federally funded National School Lunch Program (NSLP) provides free or reduced-price lunches to students at public and private schools.⁵¹ To be eligible for reduced-price lunch, a student's household must be at or below 185% FPL. To be

eligible for free lunch, a student's household must be at or below 130% FPL.⁵² Many districts in Alaska also utilize a community eligibility provision to provide free meals to all children in their district.⁵³ The following map illustrates the percentage of students in a given school district who qualify for free or reduced school lunch.



Among the 44 school districts for which data was available, just five school districts have 24% or less of students in the district who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. An additional nine school districts have between 25% and 49% of students. Thirty school districts have 50% or more of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

One way a school can qualify as a site for SNAP-Education is by having more than 50% of students enrolled in the NSLP. Five school districts have between 50% and 74% of students that qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. These are:

- » Cordova City School District (73%)
- » Nenana City School District (68%)
- » Copper River School District (60%)
- » Southeast Island School District (58%)

- » *Petersburg Borough School District (52%)*

In 25 school districts, 75% or more of students qualify to receive free or reduced-price lunch. Of these, eight school districts 100% of students qualify. These school districts are:

- » ***Alaska Gateway School District (100%)***
- » ***Chatham School District (100%)***
- » ***Dillingham City School District (100%)***
- » ***Kashunamiut School District (100%)***
- » ***Lower Yukon School District (100%)***
- » ***St. Mary's School District (100%)***
- » ***Southwest Region School District (100%)***
- » ***Yupit School District (100%)***
- » *Bering Strait School District (97%)*
- » *Kuspuk School District (96%)*
- » *Northwest Arctic Borough School District (96%)*
- » *Nome Public Schools (95%)*
- » *Bristol Bay Borough School District (94%)*
- » *Yukon Flats School District (94%)*
- » *Kake City School District (93%)*
- » *Lower Kuskokwim School District (91%)*
- » *Galena City School District (90%)*
- » *Yukon-Koyukuk School District (90%)*
- » *Annette Island School District (89%)*
- » *Hydaburg City School District (89%)*
- » *Iditarod Area School District (88%)*
- » *Lake and Peninsula Borough School District (87%)*
- » *Hoonah City School District (86%)*
- » *Mount Edgecumbe High School (79%)*
- » *Klawock City School District (78%)*

PANDEMIC-ELECTRONIC BENEFITS TRANSFER

In 2020, in response to school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. government established the Pandemic-Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program.⁵⁴ All students who were receiving free or reduced lunch and whose school shifted to remote learning were automatically enrolled and mailed P-EBT cards. These cards, similar to EBT cards issued to SNAP recipients, were to be used to purchase meals in lieu of school provided free/reduced lunch. The average benefit per student in Alaska was \$10.99 per remote school day. In total, the State was approved by the USDA to receive \$112 million to feed over 70,000 children.⁵⁵ P-EBT benefits were issued starting in March-May 2020, and continued through school year 2021-2022.⁵⁶

HEALTH AND NUTRITION STATUS

Healthy Alaskans is the name of Alaska’s health improvement plan that is created by partners from diverse sectors across the state and overseen by a backbone support team from the State of Alaska Department of Health (Alaska DOH) and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC). Healthy Alaskans 2030 outlines a series of public health objectives for the state, including a few related to overweight/obesity prevalence, nutrition, and physical activity. There are notably fewer objectives in 2030 related to these topics than there were for Healthy Alaskans 2020. As a nutrition and physical health focused program, SNAP-Ed programming aligns with and contributes to the accomplishment of Healthy Alaskans objectives by providing services to increase access to and the appeal of nutritious foods and physical activity which contribute to the overall health of individuals.

This section explores those objectives and related health indicators across the following subsections:

- » *Overweight/Obesity Prevalence*
- » *Physical Activity*
- » *Nutrition*

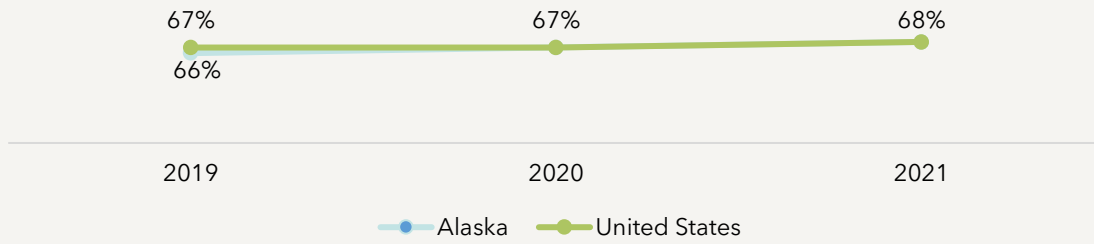
OVERWEIGHT/OBESITY PREVALENCE

As of 2018, the percentage of people who were overweight was reduced by 3% to 35%, though the prevalence of obesity increased 3% to 32%.⁵⁷ As noted by one key informant, **this data suggests that rather than reducing the number of overweight Alaskan adults, people are actually moving into the obese category.** Healthy Alaskans 2030 does not have any objectives related to overweight and/or obesity.⁵⁸

In 2021, over two-thirds of adults (68%) in Alaska were overweight or obese.⁵⁹ This prevalence has stayed fairly constant in recent years. Prevalence of overweight/obese adults are identical between Alaska and the national average.⁶⁰ In Alaska, there are no significant differences between races or ethnic groups in prevalence of overweight/obese adults.

FIGURE 12

Prevalence of overweight/obese adults are nearly identical between Alaska and at the national level.

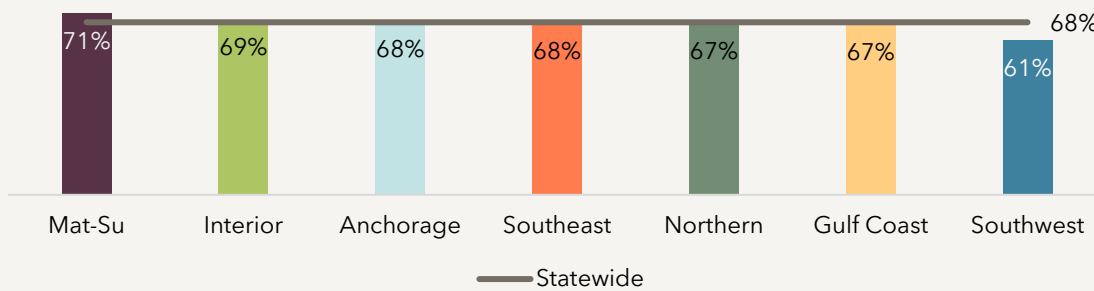


State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Health, BRFSS (2019-2021); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, BRFSS (2021)

Alaskans living in the Mat-Su have the highest likelihood of being overweight/obese (71%) while the Southwest has a 10% lower prevalence.

FIGURE 13

There is a 10% difference in overweight/obesity prevalence across public health regions.

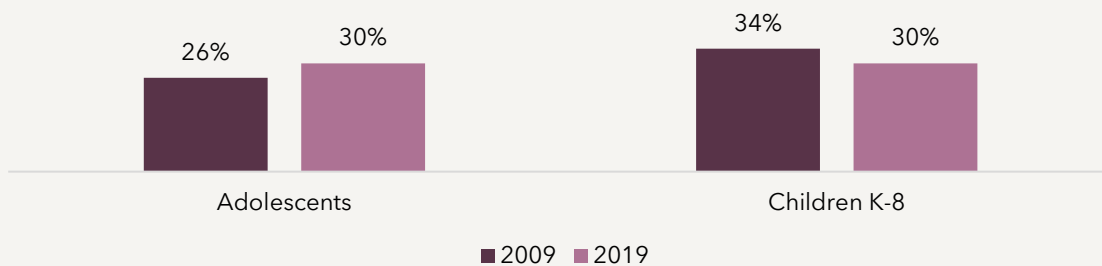


State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Health, BRFSS (2019-2021); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, BRFSS (2021)

Among adolescents (grade 9-12) in the state, there is a similar trend to the adults. In both age groups, three in every ten Alaskan youth are overweight/obese. Prevalence has increased slightly for adolescents but decreased slightly for children in grades K-8.

FIGURE 14

30% of all youth are overweight/obese in Alaska.



Healthy Alaskans 2020 Scorecard
 *Adolescents includes youth in grades 9-12.

One Healthy Alaskans 2030 objective is to increase the percentage of children in grades K-8 who meet healthy weight criteria.⁶¹ This includes a strategy of implementing school physical activity and nutrition policies and standards which includes a variety of approaches from farm to school and nutrition education to active recess and open gym time. Many of these strategies overlap with SNAP-Ed allowable activities.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

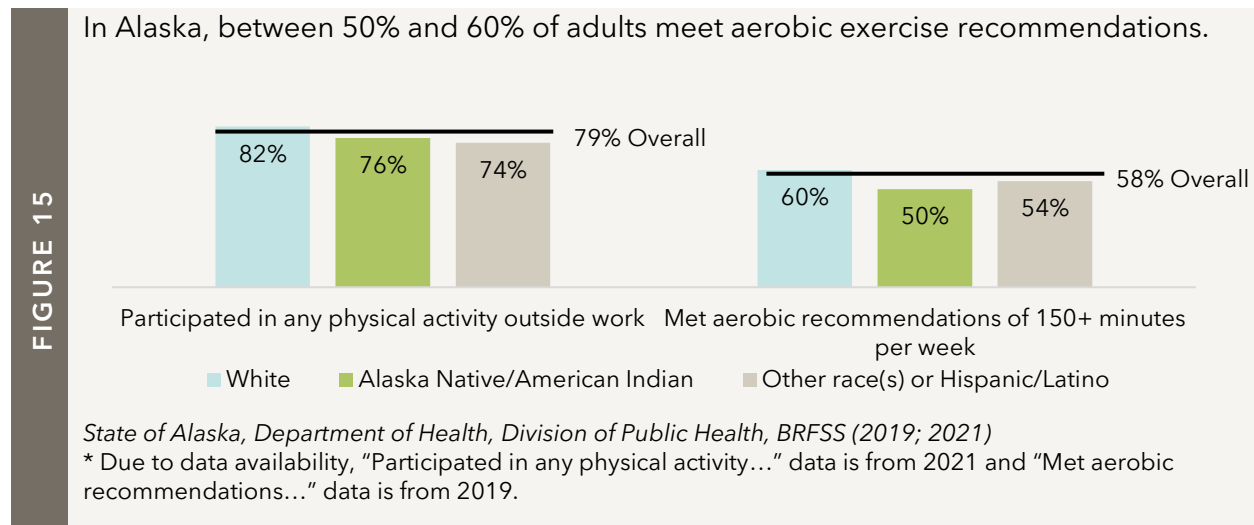
Physical activity is a key component of health. Physical activity reduces risk of chronic disease and cancer, improves mental health and brain function, improves sleep and quality of life as well as weight status, and reduces risk of serious injury.⁶²

During key informant interviews with individuals representing nutrition and physical activity programs in Alaska, half (n=4) said that physical activity is a topic that needs to be addressed. This includes encouraging and educating both adults and youth to engage in more physical activity as well as making environmental changes to make it more feasible. While some spoke of sports and exercise, others noted the importance of creating a more active lifestyle such as families playing together or walking more.

“What opportunities are there throughout the different seasons? Are people safe walking in the winter? Do schools have access to winter activity equipment? That's what we do... If they're interested in more winter activities, which the equipment is a little more expensive to have snow shoes or to have equipment for hockey ...or skiing. Schools struggle out there with funds.” -Key Informant

In 2021, four in every five adults (79%) in Alaska participated in some form of physical activity outside of work.⁶³ There is little variation across racial/ethnic groups. Fewer (58%) met recommendations of at least 150 minutes of aerobic exercise per week.⁶⁴

The state average is nearly identical to the national average of adults who meet aerobic recommendations.⁶⁵ There is also little variation in this measure across racial/ethnic groups, though AN/AI people are 10% less likely to report this activity than White individuals. There are no Healthy Alaskans 2030 objectives specific to adult physical activity, although there is an objective to improve adolescent physical activity.⁶⁶



NUTRITION

Proper nutrition is a key contributor to healthy outcomes in both children and adults. A healthy diet is associated with reduced risk of diet-related chronic disease and a healthy weight status.⁶⁷ Despite the known benefits, there are many reasons people have unhealthy diets, including high cost of healthy foods and/or lack of nearby grocery stores and healthy food options.⁶⁸ Diet-related indicators are explored below.

Fruit and Vegetables

The USDA recommends that adults eat one and a half or more cups of fruit or 100% fruit juice per day, and two or more cups of vegetables.⁶⁹ **In 2021 in Alaska, just one in four adults were meeting fruit consumption recommendations and just 15% were meeting vegetable consumption recommendations.** There is little difference across racial/ethnic groups. There are no Healthy Alaskans 2030 objectives specific to fruit and vegetable consumption.^{70,71}

FIGURE 16

In 2021, most Alaskan adults did not meet fruit or vegetable consumption recommendations.

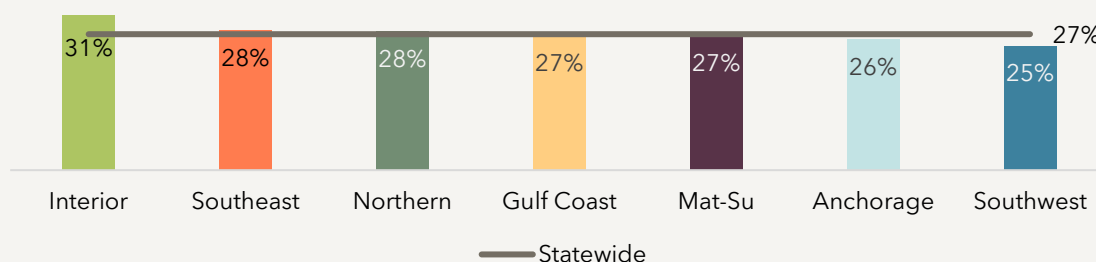


State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Health, BRFSS (2021)

The percentage of adults meeting USDA fruit consumption recommendations is relatively similar across public health regions.

FIGURE 17

In 2021, there was little variation in fruit consumption across public health regions.

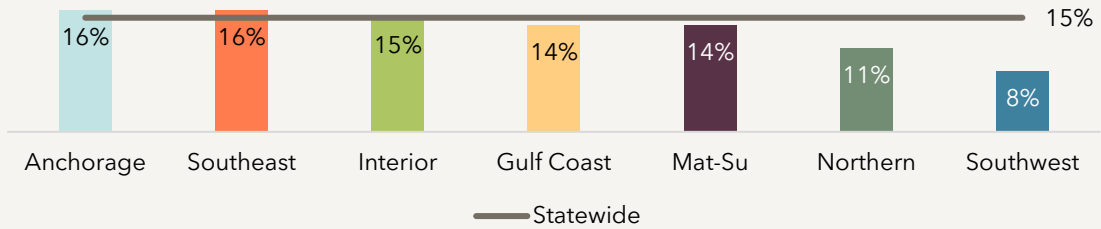


State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Health, BRFSS (2021)

Vegetable consumption is more varied across public health regions, ranging from 8% in the Southwest region to 16% in Anchorage and the Southeast Region in 2021. It is important to note that some residents, particularly in rural areas of the state, may consume plants from the land such as sea greens, berries, or other plant life, but may not think of these as vegetables. However, there is no data available to measure this discrepancy in perception and consumption.

FIGURE 18

In 2021, residents of the Southwest Region were least likely to meet vegetable consumption recommendations.

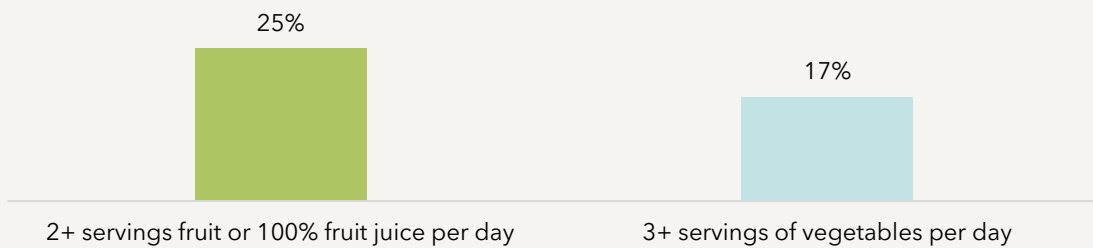


State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Health, BRFSS (2021)

Adolescents have similar, though slightly higher, likelihood of meeting fruit and vegetable consumption recommendations when compared to adults.⁷² **One-quarter of adolescents eat the recommended amount of fruit each day, while less than one-fifth eat recommended servings of vegetables.**

FIGURE 19

In 2021, just one in four Alaskan adolescents met fruit consumption recommendations, and fewer were meeting vegetable recommendations.



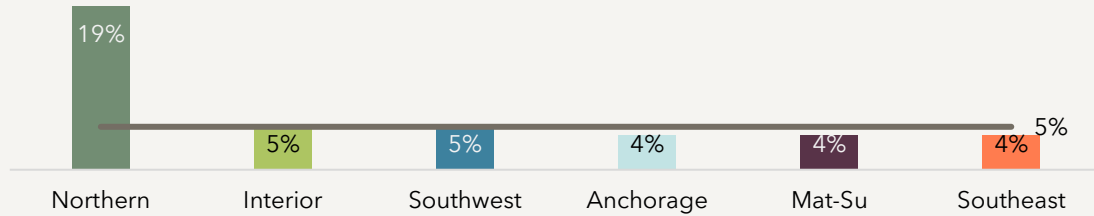
State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Health, YRBS (2019)

Sugar-Sweetened Beverages

Nationwide, sugar-sweetened beverages account for 24% of all added sugars in an average American diet, the largest category of added sugar.⁷³ In 2021, 5% of adults in Alaska consumed three or more sugar-sweetened beverages a day.⁷⁴ In the Northern Region, residents are nearly four times more likely to report this behavior than the statewide average; about one-fifth of adults in the Northern Region consume three or more sugar-sweetened beverages a day. Reasons for this difference are unknown.

FIGURE 20

In 2021, adults in the Northern region were nearly four times more likely than adults in other public health regions to consume three or more sugar-sweetened beverages a day.

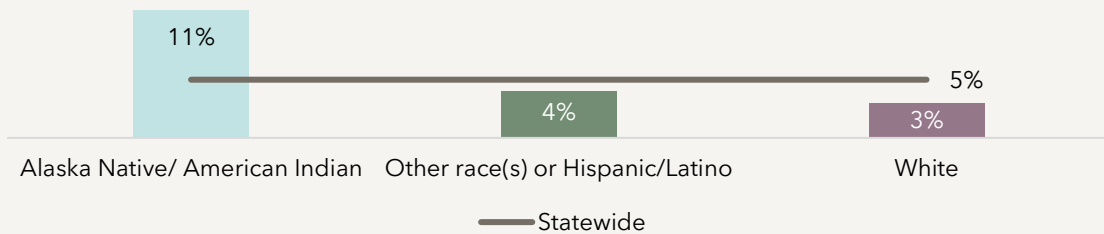


State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Health, BRFSS (2021)

Differences in sugar-sweetened beverage consumption also exist between races/ethnic groups.⁷⁵ Eleven percent of AN/AI adults in Alaska consumed three or more sugar-sweetened beverages a day, around three times that of their peers.

FIGURE 21

In 2021, AN/AI adults were much more likely than adults of other races to consume three or more sugar-sweetened beverages a day.

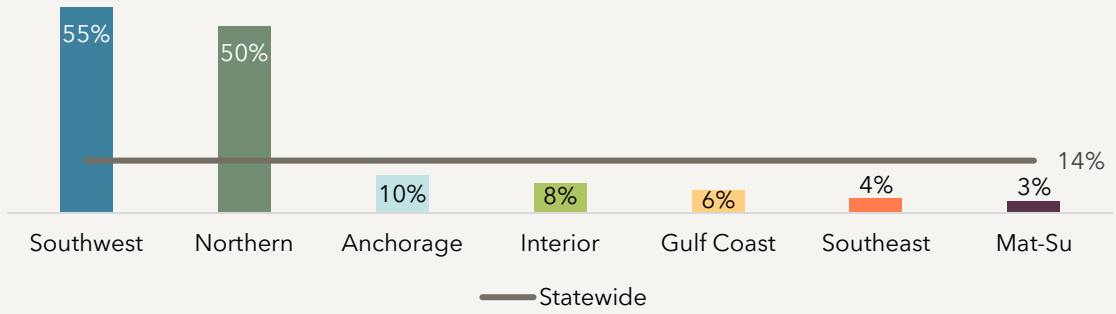


State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Health, BRFSS (2021)

The USDA Dietary Guidelines recommend that added sugars be avoided for infants and toddlers.⁷⁶ Sugar-sweetened beverages account for 25% of added sugars for infants and toddlers nationwide.⁷⁷ In 2020-2021, 14% of toddlers in Alaska consumed at least one cup of sugar-sweetened drink daily. These percentages are much higher in both the Northern (50%) and the Southwest (55%) regions.⁷⁸ Reducing the percentage of three-year-olds who drink any sugary drinks on a given day is an identified objective of Healthy Alaskans 2030 and includes strategies for a public education campaign and PSE interventions at early care and education sites.⁷⁹

In 2020-2021, toddlers in the Northern and Southwest regions were much more likely to consume one or more sweetened beverages a day.

FIGURE 22



State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Health, CUBS (2020-2021)

ALASKA FOOD SYSTEM

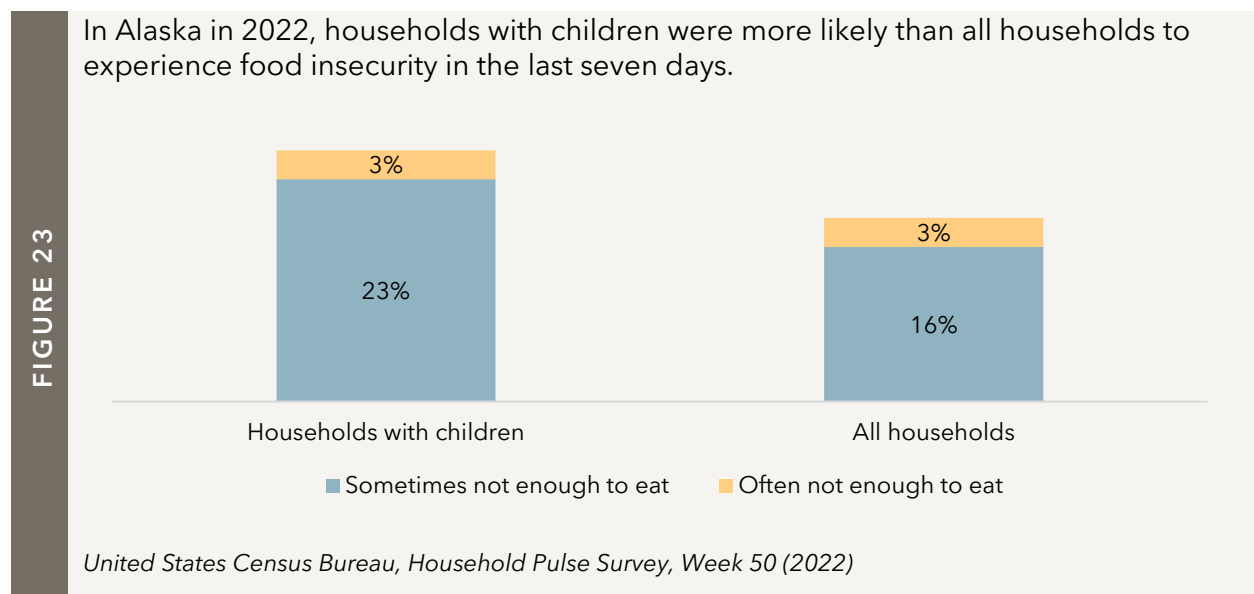
The USDA defines food systems as “complex networks that include all the inputs and outputs associated with agricultural and food production and consumption.”⁸⁰ These systems include social, economic, and environmental components. As discussed in a previous section, poor nutrition can be linked to issues and gaps in a food system such as high costs of food and/or lack of nearby options for purchasing groceries. This section explores these concepts in more depth through the following subsections:

- » *Food Security*
- » *Cost of Food*
- » *Farmers Markets that Accept SNAP*
- » *Farm to School Participation*

FOOD SECURITY

In Alaska, 90-95% of all food is imported from outside the state, which increases risk to food security for residents.⁸¹ During interviews, two individuals identified food security as an important topic to be addressed. They discussed subsistence, growing one’s own food, and supporting local producers. Focus on these topics through direct education and PSE interventions can help address individual food security through skill-building, supporting local economies, and supporting local traditional knowledge.

As of 2022, nearly one in five households in Alaska (19%) have recently experienced food insecurity, defined here as sometimes or often not having enough food to eat. Households with children are slightly more affected; about one in four households with children (26%) have recently experienced food insecurity.



Although 26% of households with children have recently experienced food insecurity, use of food banks or pantries is relatively low. Among mothers of toddlers in Alaska, just 9% have recently utilized a food bank or pantry.⁸²

Food insecurity also varies across different communities in the state. In 2021, Feeding America found that in Alaska there is a higher number of urban residents who are food insecure although there is a higher prevalence in rural areas of the state.⁸³

In September 2022, the Alaska Food Policy Council put forth a Food Security Action Plan to help address this issue.⁸⁴ The goals of the plan are:

1. *Improve food system literacy and skills to build greater capacity, awareness, and interest in food security*
2. *Build/improve food system physical infrastructure*
3. *Promote food justice, food sovereignty, greater access, and cultural awareness of foodways and traditions*
4. *Provide technical expertise and grant opportunities to increase food system capacity*
5. *Enhance, improve, and create new markets and food production*

In the SNAP-Ed FY23 Guidance, working with a food policy council is explicitly noted as an example of how states can engage in public health approach three: community and public health approaches to improve nutrition and obesity prevention.

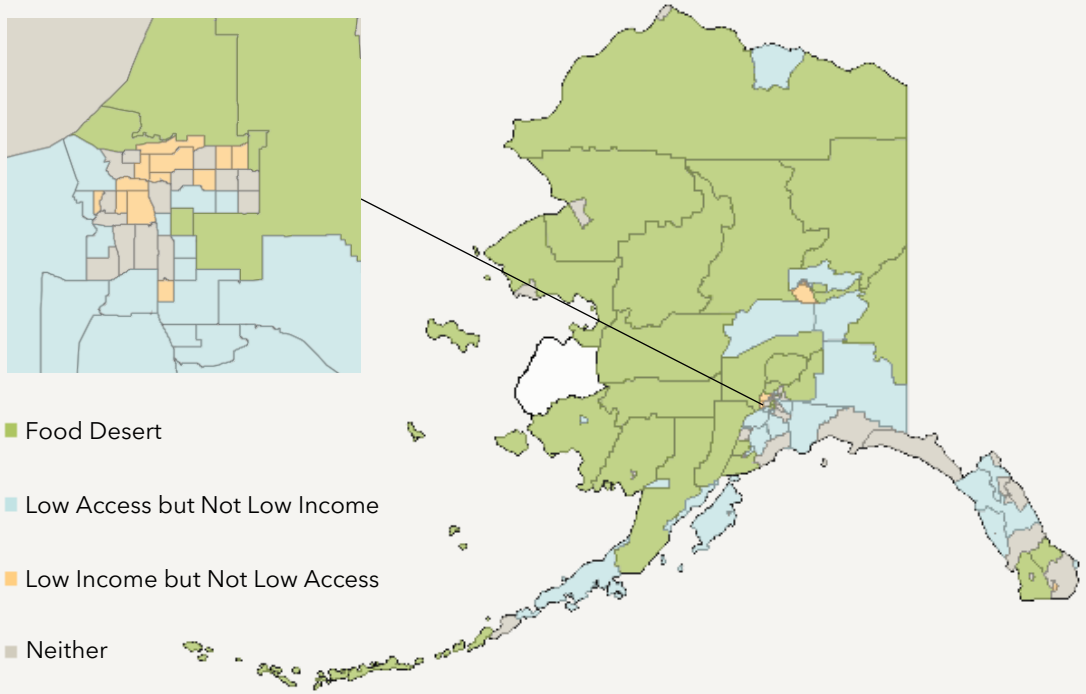
FOOD DESERTS

Food deserts are areas defined by the USDA as being low income and low access.⁸⁵ Low income areas are areas in which at least 20% of the population lives below the FPL or in which median family income is 80% or less of the metropolitan area or state median family income.⁸⁶ Low access areas are areas in which at least 33% of the population (or at least 500 people in less populated areas) is at least one mile from a large grocery store or supermarket[‡] in urban areas or 10 miles in rural areas.⁸⁷ Food deserts are measured by the USDA at the census tract level. In Alaska, 33 of the state's 167 census tracts (20%) are considered food deserts.⁸⁸

[‡] In this measure, the USDA defines "large grocery store" or "supermarket" as a "food store with at least \$2 million in sales that contain all the major food departments found in a traditional supermarket". (Dutko, P.; Ver Ploeg, M.; & Farrigan, T. [n.d.]).

FIGURE 24

One-fifth of all census tracts in Alaska are food deserts.



United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. (2019).

Note: Due to presentation of source data, census tracts reflect 2010 U.S. Census boundaries. Data was unavailable for mapping in one census tract, shown in white. However, all 167 census tracts are included in all calculations in report.

Table 3 displays the number of food deserts, both low-access/low-income census tracts and low-access only tracts, by public health region.⁸⁹ As shown in the table below, in four of the seven public health regions at least one-quarter of its census tracts are considered food deserts. In Southwest and Northern, more than 40% of census tract are food deserts.

TABLE 3: 2019 ALASKA FOOD DESERTS CENSUS TRACTS

Public Health Region	# of Census Tracts	% of Census Tracts Considered Food Deserts
Anchorage	55	9%
Gulf Coast	21	14%
Interior	26	27%
Mat-Su	24	29%
Northern	7	43%
Southeast	23	13%
Southwest	11	45%
State Totals	167	20%

Food Access Research Atlas. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. (n.d.). Retrieved February 5, 2023, from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>

SUBSISTENCE

Subsistence in Alaska is defined by the federal Bureau of Land Management as the customary and traditional uses by rural Alaska residents of wild, renewable resources for personal and familial consumption, trade or barter, or for making and selling of handicraft articles.⁹⁰ Subsistence fishing and hunting are an important component of many Alaskans' diets.⁹¹ For many Alaska Native tribes, subsistence practices are also an important cultural practice.⁹²

In rural areas in Alaska, an estimated 37 million pounds of wild foods are harvested each year.⁹³ Based on several factors, both economic and cultural, the Joint Board of Fisheries and Game identifies five areas considered to be "non-subsistence areas": Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan, and Valdez.⁹⁴ **In non-subsistence areas, an additional 13 million pounds of wild foods are harvested annually.**⁹⁵ Subsistence has the double benefit of encouraging consumption of healthy foods as well as physical activity. In addition, it is a culturally relevant way of increasing these behaviors for Alaska Native people, an important consideration for impactful and effective SNAP-Ed programming.

"I think that the local food angle is really the strongest; the promoting of traditional foods, local foods, [and] non-processed foods." - Key informant

COST OF FOOD

The average cost of groceries in Alaska is 34% higher than the national average.⁹⁶ Table 4 illustrates average monthly spending on groceries by household size and as a percentage of income at 185% FPL. For households between the sizes of one and five people living at 185% FPL, between one-quarter and one-third of income is spent on groceries.⁹⁷ Across all household sizes in Alaska, the average amount spent on food prepared and eaten at home is \$1,445 a month.⁹⁸

It is important to note that these figures are calculated using gross income to reflect federal poverty level calculation methods. Therefore, percentages of net income spent on groceries are expected to be higher.

TABLE 4: AVERAGE MONTHLY SPENDING ON GROCERIES BY HOUSEHOLD SIZE			
Household Size	Average Spent per Month	Monthly Income at 185% FPL	% of Monthly Income at 185% FPL Spent on Groceries
1	\$710	\$2,618	27%
2	\$972	\$3,527	28%
3	\$1,496	\$4,436	34%
4	\$1,663	\$5,345	31%
5	\$1,474	\$6,254	24%
6	\$1,809	\$7,163	25%
7+	\$1,990	\$8,072*	25%*

United States Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 50 (2022); United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (2022)
 * Income figures in this row are based on households of 7.

Maximum SNAP allocations vary in Alaska by a recipient's community status as urban or rural, classified by SNAP as Urban, Rural I, or Rural II.⁹⁹ Maximum allotments for the federal SNAP program are designated based on the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) calculations. The TFP is based on the cost of groceries needed to provide a healthy, budget-conscious diet for a family of four.¹⁰⁰ Within Alaska, Urban refers to communities that are equal to or 0.79% higher than the Anchorage TFP calculations.¹⁰¹ Rural I refers to communities with a TFP that is 29% higher than the Anchorage TFP, and Rural II refers to a TFP that is 56% higher than the Anchorage TFP.

In general, Urban households receive the lowest maximum allotments while those in Rural II locations received the highest. This is in alignment with the higher cost of food in more rural and remote communities than in urban ones. Data suggests that actual SNAP allocations are typically below the maximum allowed: in 2019, the average monthly SNAP allocation across all households and locations in Alaska was \$368,¹⁰² compared to \$1,457 average maximum allotment. Therefore, the above table and discussion surrounding maximum SNAP allocations should be utilized to understand differences in grocery costs between urban and rural areas and not interpreted as actual allocations received.

FARMERS MARKETS THAT ACCEPT SNAP

Acceptance of SNAP benefits at farmers markets is one way to increase access to healthy foods, particularly fruits and vegetables among recipients. It also can support local food systems and economies by adding to farmers' income sources. Currently, Alaska SNAP-Ed's Strategy Five focuses on increasing SNAP acceptance at qualifying farmers markets and conducting outreach to inform recipients. However, the grantee who has implemented this strategy, MOA DOH, has faced significant barriers to implementing changes in part due to the difficult process for markets in registering.

Farmers markets and individual vendors are eligible to receive SNAP benefits as payment so long as (1) at least 50% of their merchandise is an eligible staple food, and (2) they continually sell at least seven varieties of foods within at least three of four categories: meat, poultry or fish; bread or cereal; vegetables or fruits; or dairy products.¹⁰³ Due to the requirements for food varieties, it can be easier for a market to get approval than an individual vendor.

As of November 2022, just five farmers markets and one vendor in the state of Alaska were authorized to accept SNAP benefits out of a total of 44 markets across the state.^{104,105} The total number of vendors across these markets is unknown. Two of the markets and the individual vendor that accept SNAP benefits are located in Anchorage or Fairbanks, the state's two largest cities. The remaining three are located in Haines, Homer, and Sitka.

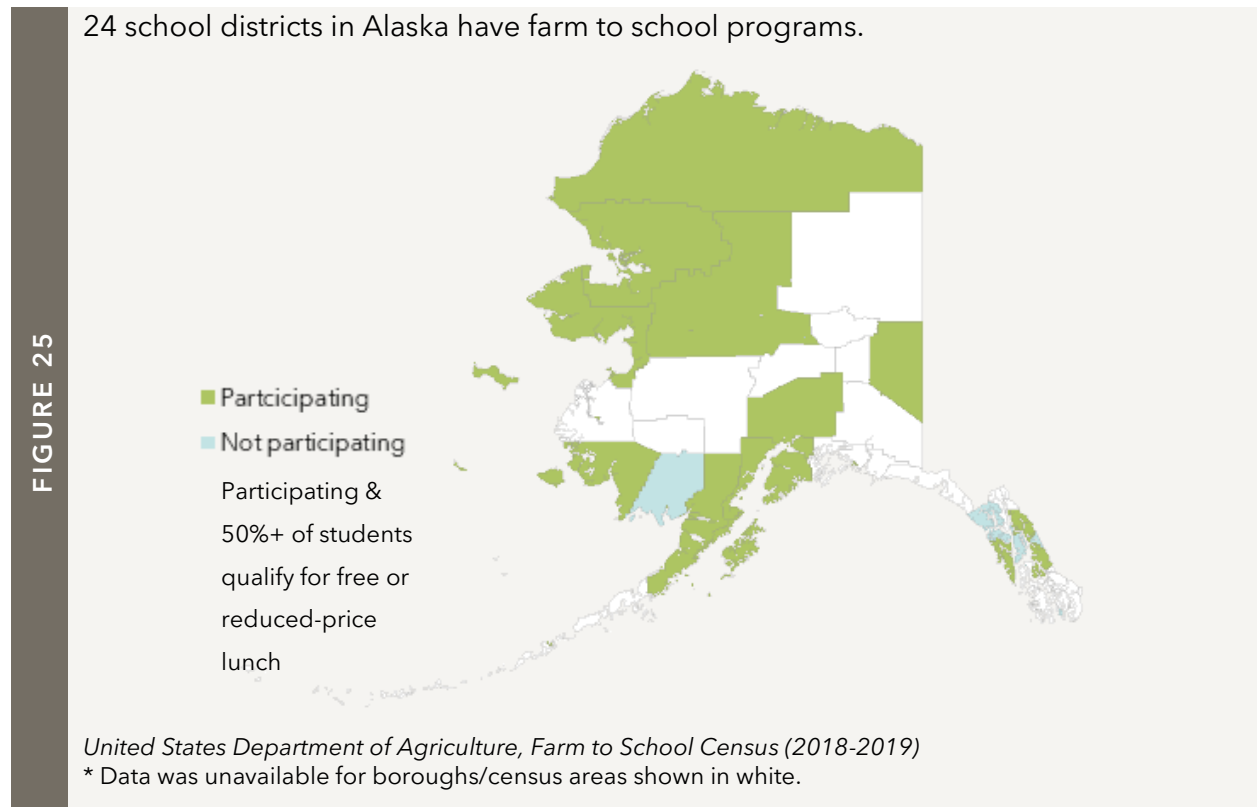
As one key informant explained, the application process for an individual farmer or market to become approved to accept SNAP by the USDA is "cumbersome" in terms of required documentation and extended waiting periods, which may be one reason there is a small number of markets in the state that accept them. However, USDA staff do provide technical assistance through the application process. This key informant also said they expect to see the number of SNAP-accepting vendors/markets to increase in coming seasons, especially as electronic payment in all forms continues to become more common. *"They want that sale, they need that sale, and if their customers aren't able to pay in cash, then the farmers have to adapt."*

FARM TO SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

"Farm to school" refers to a set of programs and/or activities undertaken by a school to purchase and serve local foods, educate students on health, food, and agriculture, and/or utilize school gardens as a teaching tool.¹⁰⁶ Farm to school programs are implemented by school food authorities (SFAs) which are almost always school districts. **As of 2019, 24 SFAs are participating in farm to school programs**, and nine are not.¹⁰⁷ Data was unavailable for 21 school districts.

"[We should be] educating kids, too. They, in turn, educate the parents pretty effectively." – Key informant

Thirteen of the participating SFAs include a food, nutrition, or agricultural education component to their program such as farmer visits, educational edible gardens, and farm field trips.¹⁰⁸ The most commonly served local foods are vegetables (seven SFAs) and proteins (five SFAs).¹⁰⁹



Sixteen of the school districts that participate in farm to school programs have 50% or more of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch:

- » *Alaska Gateway School District*
- » *Bering Strait School District*
- » *Bristol Bay Borough School District*
- » *Cordova City School District*
- » *Dillingham City School District*
- » *Galena City School District*
- » *Hydaburg City School District*
- » *Lake and Peninsula Borough School District*
- » *Lower Kuskokwim School District*
- » *Mount Edgecumbe*
- » *Nome Public Schools*
- » *Northwest Arctic Borough School District*
- » *Petersburg Borough School District*
- » *St. Mary's School District*
- » *Yukon-Koyukuk School District*
- » *Yupiit School District*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from this needs assessment demonstrate a continued need for interventions in the areas that the current SNAP-Education program has focused on, such as fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity. Alaska's large geography and low population density, as well as the high costs of providing services, present additional challenges. It is not feasible to physically serve all communities in the state with the limited resources available. Both Interior Alaska, which includes Fairbanks; and Southwestern Alaska, which includes Bethel, continue to have high levels of need. However, the high needs in some areas also obscure that many populations identified as at higher risk for food insecurity and overweight/obesity are found in rural, remote, and urban communities across the state.

The diversity of Alaska's population is both a strength and a challenge. This points to the continued need for more partnerships to develop culturally relevant approaches and resources specifically for different populations, including those in rural and remote communities which are primarily Alaska Native as well as in more urban areas with other communities at risk of food insecurity and poor nutrition, such as Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders. Social marketing is likely to continue to be an important part of reaching people across Alaska in a cost-effective way.

These recommendations are designed to help the SNAP-Education program build off what is working well and better align with where there is energy and momentum with current and potential partners in the state. It is not a comprehensive list of possible approaches to meet all identified needs. These recommendations are also mutually reinforcing. While each of them stands alone, together they encourage a more robust, focused program that still allows for a high degree of local adaptation.

RECOMMENDATION 1: *Continue the two-generation approach*

There is significant need for services among both youth and adults, and many health indicators have not improved in recent years. By working with children and their caregivers, both populations can be served, and there is a synergistic effect by the two supporting and teaching one another. Children can also be more easily reached because they frequent specific locations such as schools and out-of-school programs, and they are at a phase in their life where they learn new skills and knowledge that can impact their behaviors for the rest of their lives. Adults also purchase and prepare most of the foods that children eat at home. As their children's first teacher, they are essential partners.

RECOMMENDATION 2: *Continue focus on fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity*

Alaska SNAP-Ed's current goals focus on increasing fruit and vegetable consumption as well as increasing physical activity levels. These goals were identified based on findings from the 2018 Needs Assessment. However, these behaviors continue to be low among Alaskans, both youth and adults. It would therefore be beneficial for the state's SNAP-Ed program to sustain its efforts in these areas, which are just now bearing fruit. The social marketing campaign has had high levels of engagement and has more potential to continue to deepen its impact and diversify its messaging for different target audiences. There are also opportunities to align and build physical activity promotion off the state's other long-running social marketing campaign for children and families, "Play Every Day", which is led by Alaska DOH Division of Public Health. Direct education and policy, systems and environmental interventions focused on increasing fruit and vegetable consumption and on physical activity promotion will reinforce and support these campaigns.

RECOMMENDATION 3: *Strengthen cultural relevancy of program services*

Alaska faces a unique challenge in providing SNAP-Ed services that are culturally and locally relevant to target audiences. Areas with the highest need are often rural and have higher Alaska Native populations, making existing USDA-approved curricula and many PSE toolkits irrelevant to the realities of their food landscape. The curricula and toolkits available through the SNAP-Ed Toolkit often rely on typical grocery store produce and set-ups and other resources more commonly found in urban and suburban locations.

In FY 2018, Alaska SNAP-Ed worked with the Center for Alaska Native Health Research to develop six [mini-magazines](#) of tundra plants found in the Southwest region of the state that can be used as educational materials for participants. The program would benefit by building on this work to further create Alaska-based programming and/or support grantees and other partners to continue to do so. For example, programming could include a focus on increasing food security, nutrition, and physical activity through subsistence activities and build knowledge of local edible plants which are closely tied to Alaska Native cultural traditions and values. It would also be beneficial to help draw connections between nutritional value of subsistence foods such as tundra plants and seaweeds with common grocery store produce like broccoli or leafy greens. There is also a need for cultural relevancy for other communities in Alaska such as Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders who may have different language preferences, dietary practices, and could also benefit from learning about local foods through targeted, specific outreach and/or partnerships to create appropriate messaging.

Cultural relevancy of programming can be done by working with organizations (either a grantee or contracted firm) to develop and pilot Alaska-based direct education curricula or

other educational materials. By increasing the cultural relevancy of program services, SNAP-Ed can increase buy-in from community members and have more positive and stronger impacts for the target audience. This also helps to embrace the cultures of those served rather than impose Western ideals and beliefs onto participants.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Incorporate efforts to address food security

Food security is a concern among many residents throughout the state, both in terms of availability and affordability. With growing inflation, the need to address food security, including food resource management, is mounting. Currently, the Alaska Food Policy Council has a plan to address food security concerns which includes many diverse partners across the state. The SNAP-Ed program could support these efforts and build on the momentum of complementary work of other organizations by focusing efforts on food security. The work done by the Food Policy Council may also open the door to partnership opportunities to further increase impact. For example, SNAP-Ed could provide direct education to support participants in shopping on a budget and food resource management, as well as through PSE interventions that improve communities' food landscapes.

²⁸ SNAP Education Connection. (n.d.). *About*. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/about>

²⁹ State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2021). *Alaska population by age, sex and borough/census area, 2010, 2020 to 2021*. [Data file].
<https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/estimates/data/AgeBySexBCA.xls>

³⁰ United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2022). *Poverty guidelines: HHS poverty guidelines for 2022*. Retrieved December 20, 2022 from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>

³¹ United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2022). *Poverty guidelines: HHS poverty guidelines for 2022*. Retrieved December 20, 2022 from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>

³² United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables: Table S1701. (2021). *Poverty status in the past 12 months*.
[https://data.census.gov/table?q=poverty&g=0400000US02_02\\$0500000&tid=ACSST5Y2021.S1701](https://data.census.gov/table?q=poverty&g=0400000US02_02$0500000&tid=ACSST5Y2021.S1701)

³³ United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables: Table S1701. (2021). *Poverty status in the past 12 months*.
https://data.census.gov/table?q=S1701:+POVERTY+STATUS+IN+THE+PAST+12+MONTHS&g=0100000US_0400000US02&tid=ACSST1Y2021.S1701

³⁴ United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables: Table S1701. (2021). *Poverty status in the past 12 months*.
https://data.census.gov/table?q=S1701:+POVERTY+STATUS+IN+THE+PAST+12+MONTHS&g=0100000US_0400000US02&tid=ACSST1Y2021.S1701

³⁵ United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables: Table S1702. (2021). *Poverty status in the past 12 months of families*.
<https://data.census.gov/table?q=s1702+alaska&t=Income+and+Poverty&g=0500000US>

³⁶ United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2021). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): SNAP eligibility*. Retrieved December 20, 2022 from
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility>

³⁷ State of Alaska, Department of Health & Social Services, Division of Public Assistance. (n.d.) *SNAP subsistence purchases*. <https://health.alaska.gov/dpa/Documents/dpa/programs/SNAP/SNAP-Subsistence.pdf>

³⁸ Food and Nutrition Service U.S. Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). *Alaska: Covid-19 waivers & flexibilities*. Retrieved January 26, 2023, from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19/alaska>

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- ³⁹ State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance. (2016-2022). *SNAP and WIC recipient and households yearly data SFY2017-SFY2022*. [Data file]. Received via data request.
- ⁴⁰ Phu, L. (2023, January 31). 'Hungry, frustrated and unheard': With food stamp backlog, Alaska parent struggles to feed son. *Alaska Beacon*. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from <https://alaskabeacon.com/2023/01/31/hungry-frustrated-and-unheard-with-food-stamp-backlog-alaska-parent-struggles-to-feed-son/>
- ⁴¹ State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance. (2016-2022). *SNAP and WIC recipient and households yearly data SFY2017-SFY2022*. [Data file]. Received via data request.
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- ⁴⁷ State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance. (n.d.). *Alaska WIC income eligibility guidelines; Effective from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023*. <https://health.alaska.gov/dpa/Documents/dpa/programs/Nutrition/WIC/Participants/WIC-Income-Eligibility-Guidelines-FY23.pdf>
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- ⁵⁴ Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, Alaska Child Nutrition Programs. (n.d.). *P-EBT frequently asked questions*. <https://education.alaska.gov/tls/CNP/P-EBT/P-EBT%202.0%20Q&A.pdf>
- ⁵⁵ Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. (n.d.). *Alaska's Pandemic EBT program approved to help feed over 70,000 Alaska children*. Retrieved January 30, 2023, from <https://education.alaska.gov/pandemic-ebt-program-approved-by-usda>
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- ⁵⁸ Healthy Alaskans. (n.d.). *HA2030 Objectives, Strategies & Actions*. Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://www.healthyalaskans.org/alaska-health-priorities/objectives-strategies-actions/>
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- ⁶¹ Healthy Alaskans. (November 2020). *Healthy Alaskans 2020 scorecard: All Alaska*. Retrieved December 21, 2022 from <https://www.healthyalaskans.org/data/scorecard/>
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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

This needs assessment was conducted using a mixed-methods approach including interviews and review of indicator data on the target audience of SNAP-Ed programming through publicly available data sets and requested data.

INTERVIEWS

In-depth one-on-one key informant interviews were held with nine professionals from nutrition and physical activity programs within Alaska. Interviews took place in September and October 2022 and were held via Zoom video conference platform. Interviewees were:

- » *Marcia Anderson, Health Promotion Manager, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium*
- » *Jo Dawson, Manager, Child Nutrition Programs, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development*
- » *Dana Diehl, Director, Wellness & Prevention Department, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium*
- » *Erin Fahsholtz, Project Assistant, Farmers Market Program, Alaska Department of Health*
- » *Jennifer Johnson, Nutrition Coordinator, Women Infants and Children Program, Alaska Department of Health*
- » *Iva Karoly-Lister, Sacred Beginnings Program Coordinator, Rural Alaska Community Action Program*
- » *Diane Peck, Dietician II, Physical Activity and Nutrition Program, Alaska Department of Health*
- » *Leslie Shallcross, Professor of Extension, Health, Home and Family Development Agent, University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Services*
- » *Elizabeth Imbo Walsh, Director, Family Nutrition Program, Alaska Department of Health*

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were then uploaded into Dedoose software program to identify key themes and conduct analysis. Interview guides are included in Appendix B.

SECONDARY DATA

Stellar Group analyzed a combination of publicly available and specially requested secondary data on demographics and indicators related to SNAP-Ed's target populations. Such data was imported into Microsoft Excel and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Maps were created in ArcGIS using shapefiles from the United States Census Bureau. All specific sources and full citations, including URLs where relevant, are referenced in context throughout this report using endnotes.

Publicly available data sources include:

- » *State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, population data*
- » *United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey*
- » *United States Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey*
- » *United States Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program*
- » *United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Food Access Research Atlas*
- » *United States Department of Agriculture, Farm to School Census*
- » *United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service*

Requested data sources include:

- » *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)*
- » *State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Health, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)*
- » *State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Health, Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey (CUBS)*
- » *State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)*
- » *State of Alaska, Department of Health, Division of Public Health, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)*

ANALYSIS NOTES

In Figure 7 on page 15, the original data source reported "Alaska Native" and "American Indian" as two disaggregated data points. They were combined into "Alaska Native/American Indian" here for consistency with other indicators.

In Table 4 on page 31, "Average Spent by Month" was calculated by dividing average spent per week by 7 (days in a week) and multiplying by 30.4 (the average length of a month). "Monthly Income at 185% FPL" was calculated by dividing annual income at 185% FPL by 365 (days in a year) and multiplying by 30.4 (the average length of a month).

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

ALASKA KEY-INFORMANT SNAP-ED INTERVIEW GUIDE

ALASKA SNAP-ED NEEDS ASSESSMENT BACKGROUND

Alaska's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) program provides nutrition education for low-income Alaskans. The goal of SNAP-Ed is to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will make healthy food choices within a limited budget and choose physically active lifestyles consistent with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPlate. To be strategic and use finite resources wisely, SNAP-Ed is conducting a needs assessment to:

- » *Update population + needs data from 2018 SNAP-ED needs assessment*
- » *Recommend target locations and audiences for PSE activities*
- » *Improve Service delivery*

As part of the needs assessment, interviews are being conducted with professionals from other nutrition and physical activity promotion programs in Alaska to explore potential partnerships, avoid duplication of services, and gain insight into the greatest need in Alaska within this focus area.

Due to the nature of this report, confidentiality/anonymity cannot be guaranteed. The names of interviewed individuals will be included in the final report. To help with transcription and to make sure I don't miss anything, I would like to record this conversation. The recording will be stored in a secure file and will not be shared with others.

We appreciate you taking the time to speak with us today. Any questions before we get started?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Role/Background and General Questions

First, I'd like to learn a little bit more about your role, and the programs/project you support.

1. What is your current role? How long have you been in this position?
2. What projects and priorities does your program or organization have related to nutrition, obesity prevention and/or physical activity?
 - » *What are the goals of each of the projects? Does your program provide any direct education? If so, please describe.*
 - » *Who is your target audience? (race/ethnicity, gender, geography, age, income, etc.)*
 - *How is target audience identified?*
 - » *What partners do you work with, if any?*

- » *What kind of social impacts do you see as a result of current projects implemented? What has been most beneficial for individuals and communities?*

3. Have there been any staffing/workforce challenges that have affected your project/program? If so, can you describe? What have you tried to address them?

Other Nutrition/Physical Activity/Obesity Prevention Organizations, Programs, & Partnerships

4. What other organizations or programs are you aware of that conduct direct education to promote nutrition and/or physical activity?

- » *Do any of these focus specifically on low-income audiences that you're aware of?*

5. What other organizations or programs are you aware of that improve access to healthy foods and promote physical activity through public health approaches, such as policy, systems, and/or environmental changes?

- » *Do any of these focus specifically on low-income audiences that you're aware of?*

6. Are you aware of any local or state social marketing campaigns intended to influence food choices and/or physical activity behaviors?

- » *Do any of these focus specifically on low-income audiences that you're aware of?*

7. Can you speak to any impacts you've seen as a result of these projects? What seems most beneficial for individuals and communities?

Needs & Gaps

8. What physical activity or obesity prevention topics are most in need of being addressed for low-income Alaskans?

9. In your experience, what audience (age, sex, education, etc.) is most in need of nutrition and physical activity services in your area? Why do you think this?

- » *Are there populations that are overserved or well-served already?*

10. What do you think is important to consider when providing services to these audiences?

11. In your opinion, what are the barriers to reaching populations most in need of services? Why do you think this?

- » *What suggestions do you have for overcoming these barriers?*

12. Is there anything else we haven't talked about that you would like to share with me?