



SUMMARY REPORT

Phase I Food Security Priorities



Ensuring equitable access to quality, nutritious food is vital to improving health and social outcomes for people experiencing food insecurity.

INTRODUCTION

Food security continues to be a priority in Michigan, with numerous efforts supporting recommendations from the Food Security Council and local initiatives to provide access to healthy, nutritious food.

In April 2022, 45 food initiatives were included in Phase I of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) Strategy. This report summarizes the results of implementing the Phase I Food Security initiatives, identifies and addresses preliminary policy and data barriers, and provides several next steps for developing innovative, cross-cutting food security initiatives to address Michigan's current needs.

SDOH, Food, and Health Disparities

Though the overall rate of food insecurity has stayed relatively consistent, vulnerable subpopulations faced disparate increases in food insecurity in 2020.



Estimates for 2020 show that food insecurity increased to approximately 1.9 million people in Michigan, including 552,000 children.



Between August 2021 and August 2022, food prices have risen **11.4%** and total food budget share increased from 9.4% of disposable income to **10.3%**.



Black and Hispanic households and households with incomes below 185% of the poverty threshold consistently face higher rates of food insecurity.

Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2021

Phase I Food Security Priorities

MDHHS program areas have identified measurable objectives for the Food Security focus area that will continue to be refined and expanded throughout implementation of the SDOH Strategy. The Food Security focus area includes three priorities:



Supporting people made vulnerable to food insecurity: Solutions to promote food security will require interventions tailored to people and communities disadvantaged by policies, practices, and systems. This includes strategies to eliminate barriers to a person's ability to be food secure and supporting community assets that not only improve short-term access to food but strengthen systems for long-term food security.



Streamlining processes to improve access to food benefits: An inward look at MDHHS programs and policies that support food security. Identify process and quality improvement efforts to best service Michigan residents.



Alignment on key food security reforms: Community, local, and state partnerships allow us to reach communities and provide enhanced support. Alignment of efforts with existing stakeholders and exploring opportunities to align with additional partners are vital to ensure that programs are connected for a greater impact.

Within each priority, specific strategies and objectives have been outlined to measure progress.

Current measures for 2022 and 2023 are process-based as programs focus on the improvement and alignment process of the strategy.



Phase I Initiatives Progress Report

45

food security initiatives outlined in Phase I of the MDHHS Social Determinants of Health Strategy.

26

food security initiatives have been implemented as of February 2023.

Monitoring progress for food security initiatives

In February 2023, the MDHHS Policy and Planning Office created a survey to monitor progress of the 45 food initiatives included in Phase I of the MDHHS SDOH Strategy. The survey asked for a status update on implementation and general updates regarding progress as well as an opportunity to share barriers and successes stories.

The survey also allowed program area leads the opportunity to share any data needs/ barriers as well as details about their engagement strategy with stakeholders and Michigan residents as it relates to the specific initiatives. A summary of that survey will be provided in this segment.

Strategic Objectives to Support Food Security



Priority: Supporting populations made vulnerable to food insecurity

Strategy Objective	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Data Need Identified
<i>Strategy FS-1: Strengthen and make it easier for families to connect to the existing food and nutrition safety net, including WIC and FAP/SNAP.</i>		
Initiative FS-1.0.1: Collect data from focus group interviews conducted by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to understand why WIC/SNAP dual-enrollees drop out of the WIC program.	Yes	No data need identified.
Initiative FS-1.0.2: Identify areas with few to no retailers accepting WIC through the creation of a Food Desert ArcGIS map.	Yes	
Initiative FS-1.0.3: Develop and implement education programs targeted to retailers and community organizations about WIC benefits.	No	
Initiative FS-1.0.4: Receive vendor feedback on current and future WIC program policies through the WIC Vendor Advisory Council.	Yes	
Initiative FS-1.0.5: Launch a Client Advisory Council (CAC) to inform changes in WIC programming and policies by receiving direct feedback from WIC clients and build a stronger relationship with clients to identify equitable solution-based approaches.	Yes	

Several initiatives under **Strategy FS-1** have been implemented, including collecting data from focus group interviews, identifying areas with few or no retailers accepting WIC, and creating a Client Advisory Council (CAC). However, the targeted education programs for retailers and community organizations (**Initiative FS-1.0.3**) were not implemented due to staff capacity and prioritization of current grant initiatives.

The CAC has achieved some successes, including setting priority goals for 2023, submitting public comments on proposed WIC food package changes, and providing feedback to improve the WIC MDHHS website. The CAC will also be speaking at upcoming conferences and hosting a joint meeting with the Vendor Advisory Council (VAC) to discuss the WIC client shopping experience.

FS-1 Action Steps and Policy Recommendations:



Assess the feasibility and value of implementing Initiative FS-1.0.3 by holding a meeting in FY23 to discuss the initiative with WIC staff.



Consider leveraging existing resources to expand education programs for retailers and community organizations about WIC benefits, if it is determined that such efforts do not duplicate current activities.



Continue supporting the CAC in its pilot stage and monitor its progress in achieving its goals, while encouraging collaboration with the VAC to improve the WIC client shopping experience.



Implement the changes suggested by the CAC to make the WIC MDHHS website more client-friendly.



Hold an internal meeting in FY23 to discuss the feasibility and overall interest to implement Initiative FS-1.0.3 with retailers, assessing whether the initiative is value-added to the WIC program or duplicating current efforts.



Support the CAC's participation in the WIC State Conference and WIC Vendor Conference to present their findings and insights.

Strategy Objective	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Data Need Identified
<i>Strategy FS-1: Strengthen and make it easier for families to connect to the existing food and nutrition safety net, including WIC and FAP/SNAP.</i>		
Objective FS-1.1: During FY22 (October 2021-September 2022), reduce the “SNAP gap,” or the gap between those eligible to enroll in SNAP and those actively enrolled in SNAP, by 20%, from 730,000 to 585,000 individuals.	Yes	No data need identified.
Initiative FS-1.1.1: Partner with Benefits Data Trust on MI Benefits Center to enroll 4,000 new SNAP clients during 2022.	Yes	
Initiative FS-1.1.2: Pair SNAP enrollment with Medicaid redetermination process at the conclusion of the Public Health Emergency period.	Yes	
Initiative FS-1.1.3: Conduct three text outreach campaigns to SNAP gap residents during 2022.	Yes	
Objective FS-1.2: By December 2024, achieve a 95% SNAP participation rate through outreach, engagement, and collaboration.	Yes	
Initiative FS-1.2.1: Expand early access to SNAP to improve nutritional outcomes.		
Initiative FS-1.2.2: Establish a learning network of SNAP outreach partners to share best practices.		

Various **FS-1.1 and 1.2** initiatives have been implemented, such as partnering with Benefits Data Trust on MI Benefits Center, pairing SNAP enrollment with Medicaid redetermination, conducting text outreach campaigns, expanding early access to SNAP, and establishing a learning network of SNAP outreach partners.

Expansion efforts for these initiatives continue statewide, and five partners have joined the learning network. However, some barriers persist, such as the difficulty of concretely connecting improvement and growth, as well as funding limitations for program expansion. The main barrier to achieving these goals is the need for additional non-federal funding to share with outreach partners, as it is difficult for partners to find the necessary funds for program growth.

FS-1 Action Steps and Policy Recommendations:



Advocate for the development of a yearly non-federal funding pool from the legislature to support program growth and ensure outreach partners can maintain and expand their efforts.



Continue implementing and evaluating the success of current initiatives, such as the MI Benefits Center, Medicaid redetermination pairing, and text outreach campaigns, to determine their effectiveness in reducing the SNAP gap.



Strengthen the learning network of SNAP outreach partners to facilitate the sharing of best practices and maximize the impact of existing resources.



Monitor and evaluate the progress of initiatives aimed at increasing SNAP participation rates, such as expanding early access to SNAP, to ensure that they are effectively improving nutritional outcomes.



Explore additional funding sources, partnerships, or collaborations to enhance the efforts of SNAP outreach partners and help achieve the targeted participation rate.

Strategy Objective	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Data Need Identified
<i>Strategy FS-2: Capture information on areas and conditions of food insecurity statewide to improve awareness and enable strategic decision making.</i>		
Initiative FS-2.0.1: Systematically identify and catalogue areas of food insecurity across Michigan and create a comprehensive Food Insecurity map that captures SNAP enrollment, Michigan Department of Education (MDE) feeding programs, food bank locations, and demographic data from the American Community Survey (ACS).	Yes	No data need identified.
Initiative FS-2.0.2: Map SNAP retailer locations to identify areas with few to no retailers accepting SNAP.	No	

The report discusses the results of **Strategy FS-2**, which focuses on capturing information on food insecurity statewide to improve awareness and enable strategic decision-making. Both initiatives have been successfully implemented, and [interactive maps](#) have been created, allowing users to compare various indicators, such as unemployment, housing burden, poverty, and others, against county-level geographic information on available food security resources.

The [interactive maps](#) displays the following geographic information indicated by county on available food security resources:

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- Food Banks and Distribution Centers
- MI BRIDGES Community Partners
- Historical SNAP Store Locations
- MDHHS Field Offices

One barrier is identified: the lack of a reliable public source of WIC retailers.

FS-2 Action Steps and Policy Recommendations:



Continue the search for a reliable public source of WIC retailers. Once a reliable source is found, incorporate the WIC retailer data into future versions of the interactive map.

Strategy Objective	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Data Need Identified
<i>Strategy FS-3: Increase awareness and utilization of food and nutrition programs for older adults.</i>		
Initiative FS-3.0.1: Expand access to Senior Project FRESH/Market FRESH to at least one additional underrepresented area.	Yes	Data is needed to measure the impact.
Initiative FS-3.0.2: Increase awareness and utilization of nutrition programs funded by the Behavioral and Physical Health and Aging Services Administration.	Yes	
Initiative FS-3.0.3: Continue to offer and promote home-delivered meals through home- and community-based programs.	Yes	

For **Initiative FS-3.0.1**, farmer’s markets were expanded into 13 different counties. Three of these counties had over 10% of adults living in poverty.

Awareness of nutrition programs was increased through three live conference calls to agencies serving older adults in Michigan. In terms of utilization, both allocation and redemption values of coupons increased from 2021 to 2022. In addition, the number of total participants increased by 7% from 2021 to 2022.



Strategy Objective	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Data Need Identified
<i>Strategy FS-4: Continue to expand on the innovative and collaborative efforts to provide food benefits that were implemented in response to the pandemic.</i>		
<p>Successful initiatives to derive best practices from and guide future efforts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnership with the Food Bank Council of Michigan to provide Quarantine Food Boxes to older adults who were unable to access existing food distribution sites. ▪ Partnership with the Community Action Agency Network to provide Quarantine and Hygiene Boxes (Q-Boxes) to low-income individuals and families isolating from exposure or recovering from COVID-19. ▪ Partnership with the Michigan Department of Education to provide supplemental food assistance benefits to students who have temporarily lost access to free or reduced-price school meals due to the pandemic through the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) Program. 	Yes	No data need is identified.

Strategy FS-4 focuses on continuing to expand on innovative and collaborative efforts to provide food benefits implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Successful initiatives include partnerships with the Food Bank Council of Michigan to provide quarantine Food Boxes to older adults, with the Community Action Agency Network to provide quarantine and Hygiene Boxes to low-income individuals and families, and with the Michigan Department of Education to provide supplemental food assistance benefits through the Pandemic EBT Program.

The initiative has been implemented as intended, and data is available to measure its impact. However, the federal government has ended the Emergency Allocation funding, making it difficult to continue issuing payments. The team is pursuing approval to issue summer PEBT and regular PEBT benefits.



FS-4 Action Steps and Policy Recommendations:



Advocate for change at the federal level to make the temporary benefit increases a permanent option, in some capacity, for SNAP recipients.

Strategy Objective	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Data Need Identified
<i>Strategy FS-5: Implement activities targeting racial injustice and inequity in food and nutrition.</i>		
Initiative FS-5.1.1: Pilot an equity impact assessment tool to ensure policies, practices, and programs are developed with an equity framework, consider systemic inequities, and examine potential impacts.	No	Data needed to measure the impact. Updating the MI map of low-income areas with farmer's market locations.
Initiative HS-5.1.1: Capture information on areas and conditions of food insecurity statewide to identify disparities and inform future strategies.	Yes	Collecting data on food deserts in MI is needed.

Strategy Objective	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Data Need Identified
<i>Strategy FS-5: Implement activities targeting racial injustice and inequity in food and nutrition.</i>		
Initiative FS-5.1.3: Promote Breastfeeding Advocates of Color, a peer support network of breastfeeding professionals of color, trying to address disparities and improve breastfeeding rates.	No	Data needed to measure the impact.
Initiative FS-5.1.4: Expand farmers markets into at least one additional under-represented area in Michigan, such as a low-income area, an area considered a food desert, or a Native American or Tribal organization.	<i>Yes; still working on expanding into food deserts and within Tribal organizations and communities</i>	Updating the MI map of low-income areas with farmer's market locations.
Initiative FS-5.1.5: Initiate collaborative discussions with at least two Native American organizations, urban and/or tribal, regarding participation in nutrition programs for older adults.	No	Collecting data on food deserts in MI is needed.

Strategy FS-5 focuses on implementing initiatives that target racial injustice and inequity in food and nutrition. Five initiatives have been developed to address these concerns. Among them, two initiatives have been successfully implemented, while the remaining three are currently in progress. The initiatives involve piloting an equity impact assessment tool, capturing information on food insecurity, promoting breastfeeding advocates of color, expanding farmers' markets into underrepresented areas, and initiating collaborative discussions with Native American organizations.

Barriers:

The expansion of farmers' markets into underrepresented areas in Michigan (**Initiative FS-5.1.4**) has not been fully implemented, with challenges such as identifying and connecting with the appropriate tribal contacts and collecting data on food deserts. Priority populations experiencing barriers related to these initiatives include people who are visually impaired or blind, identify as Hispanic, and could benefit from public assistance benefits.

Some of the barriers include identifying and connecting with the appropriate tribal contacts, updating our Michigan map of low-income areas with farmer's market locations, and collecting data on food deserts in Michigan. Lastly, in connecting with tribal groups and inviting them to participate in Senior Project Fresh, it was found that some tribes have concerns that some of their traditional foods are not part of Senior Project Fresh offerings.

FS-5 Action Steps and Policy Recommendations:



Work with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) to identify additional farmers for inclusion in Senior Project FRESH (SPF).



Update the Michigan map with farmers' market locations overlapped on low-income areas, food deserts, and tribal regions to better track and monitor coverage.



Address concerns of tribal groups by considering the inclusion of their traditional foods in SPF offerings.



Strengthen partnerships with the WIC program and the State Tribal liaison to identify and connect with appropriate tribal contacts, and to collaborate on bringing more farmers' markets to SPF.



Secure additional funding to support the implementation of initiatives aimed at reducing racial injustice and inequity in food and nutrition.



Create an ongoing system to survey the ESA division through the Equity Impact Assessment (EIA) lens and prioritize projects based on survey findings.



Establish an ESA Compensation Policy to compensate individuals with lived experience who provide expertise on projects addressing racial injustice and inequity in food and nutrition.



Priority: Streamlining processes to improve access to food benefits

Strategy Objective	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Data Need Identified
<i>Strategy FS-6: Remove immediate and systemic barriers to access for food and cash assistance programs through process and program improvements.</i>		
Initiative FS-6.1.1: Promote awareness of opportunities for residents to purchase eligible food items online using EBT benefits through SNAP outreach partners.	Yes	Data is needed to measure the impact of this initiative.
Initiative FS-6.1.2: Improve services for English Language Learners (ELL) through review of existing language access procedures and policy, and by addressing gaps in services through implementation of new initiatives.	Yes	
Initiative FS-6.1.3: Promote awareness of the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP). Under this program, some recipients of the Food Assistance Program (FAP) may use their benefits to purchase meals from authorized restaurants in Michigan.	Yes	
Initiative FS-6.1.4: Review and update processes for information distribution to ensure food assistance programs and residents receive accurate and timely updates.	Yes	
Initiative FS-6.1.5: Assess the use of work-related sanctions and implement process improvements.	Yes	

Strategy FS-6 aims to remove immediate and systemic barriers to access for food and cash assistance programs through process and program improvements. Several initiatives have been implemented, including promoting awareness of online EBT purchases, improving services for English Language Learners, promoting awareness of the Restaurant Meals Program, reviewing and updating information distribution processes, and assessing the use of work-related sanctions.

The initiatives have been implemented as intended, but data is lacking to measure their impact. There are barriers to implementing changes due to federal or state regulations, system limitations, and funding for staff.

FS-6 Action Steps and Policy Recommendations:



Collaborate with partners and internal sources to assist with implementing changes.



Consider incorporating cold calls to customers to gather information and improve services for food and cash assistance programs.



Strategy Objective	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Data Need Identified
<i>Strategy FS-7: Improve the MI Bridges platform to make the application and renewal process easier and more intuitive.</i>		
Objective FS-7.1: By December 2022, increase the number of applications being processed using Project One Day methodology to 90%.	Yes	Feedback mechanism is needed to receive input from clients/stakeholders. More time is needed to analyze data. Data source verification needed.
Initiative FS-7.1.1: Implement Project One Day and Project Renew within every MDHHS office to streamline the processing of assistance applications, increase client ease of recertification, improve customer service, and create efficiency gains in MDHHS' largest assistance programs.	Yes	
Objective FS-7.2: By December 2022, increase the FAP/SNAP approval rate by 10% using Project One Day methodology.	Yes	
Objective FS-7.3: By December 2024, reduce the throttle rate for MI Bridges calls by 20%.	Yes	
Initiative FS-7.3.1: Implement the Elderly Simplified Application Project to provide streamlined application and recertification for older adults.	Yes	
Initiative FS-7.3.2: Expand the use of benefits navigators (through phone assistance or providing in-person support) to assist individuals with completing the enrollment process for a range of assistance programs.	Yes	

Strategy FS-7 works to improve the MI Bridges platform to make the application and renewal process easier and more intuitive for clients. Two key objectives are to increase the number of applications processed using Project One Day methodology to 90% by December 2022 and to increase the FAP/SNAP approval rate by 10% using the same methodology. Although the initiative has been implemented as intended, there are barriers such as the lack of a feedback mechanism, insufficient staffing, and outdated policies that do not align with the One Day methodology.

Objective FS-7.3 focuses on reducing the throttle rate for MI Bridges calls by 20% by December 2024. Two initiatives have been implemented to achieve this objective, including implementing the Elderly Simplified Application Project and expanding the use of benefits navigators.

The initiatives have been implemented as intended, and data is available to measure their impact. However, there are barriers to progress, such as staffing challenges and infrastructure challenges with multiple portals and sources of data verification.

FS-7 Action Steps and Policy Recommendations:



Verification policy needs to be updated to show that specialists assist the clients, rather than implement a feedback mechanism by taking a random sample of clients approved for FAP and conducting brief, structured interviews or surveys to gather feedback and collect data.



Update policies to align with the One Day mission, shifting the responsibility of verification collection from the client to the specialist, and incorporating the two-call approach to increase pick-up rates.



Consolidate and update written policies, including policy clarifications, to ensure all offices and specialists are aware of current processing requirements.



Implement a texting system to improve communication with clients, notifying them about upcoming calls from MDHHS, and increasing pick-up rates for phone interviews.



Address staffing shortages by allocating additional resources and personnel to One Day teams, ensuring the methodology is implemented as intended and reducing reapplications.

Strategy Objective	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Data Need Identified
<i>Strategy FS-8: Increase cross-enrollment rates in public assistance programs through outreach and barrier mitigation.</i>		
Objective FS-8.1: By October 2023, increase by 5% the number of Medicaid recipients who are cross-enrolled in the Food Assistance Program (FAP) and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program.	No	Data is needed to measure the impact.
Objective FS-8.2: By December 2024, increase the number of children ages 5 and under who are cross-enrolled in Medicaid, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program, the Food Assistance Program (FAP), and State Emergency Relief program by 5%.	No	
Objective FS-8.3: By December 2022, increase the number of referrals sent by community partners on behalf of clients from 0 to 50 through implementation of the MI Bridges Closed-Loop Referral Pilot Program.	Yes	No data need identified.
Initiative FS-8.3.1: Create the ability for pilot groups of the MI Bridges community partners to send referrals to other community partners on behalf of clients.	Yes	
Objective FS-8.4: By the end of December 2022, attain 60% of referrals that are successfully connected with services.	Yes	

The objective of **FS 8.1 and 8.2** is to increase cross-enrollment rates in public assistance programs through outreach and barrier mitigation. Due to fluctuations related to the Public Health Emergency (PHE), the Enrollment Services Administration has decided to re-launch these two initiatives after the PHE concludes. This approach will allow for a more accurate assessment of the situation using stable data, ensuring that the objectives and initiatives are grounded in a solid understanding of the current landscape.

Once the PHE ends, the Enrollment Services Administration will work towards achieving the objectives outlined in **Strategy FS-8**, focusing on increasing cross-enrollment rates in public assistance programs through outreach and barrier mitigation.

The report highlights the progress made on Strategy FS-8, which aims to increase cross-enrollment rates in public assistance programs through outreach and barrier mitigation. Two key objectives were outlined, **objective FS-8.3** aimed to increase the number of referrals sent by community partners on behalf of clients from 0 to 50 by December 2022, through the implementation of the MI Bridges Closed-Loop Referral Pilot Program. **Objective FS-8.4** set a target of successfully connecting 60% of referrals with services by the end of December 2022.

The program has been successfully implemented as intended, and the goal of 50 referrals sent was achieved by December 2022. The report does not mention any barriers or action steps and policy recommendations.

Given the achievement of the initial goal, it would be beneficial to consider future steps for further improvement and expanding the program's impact.



Priority: Alignment on key food security reforms

Strategy Objective	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Data Need Identified
<p><i>Strategy FS-9: Identify additional opportunities to align with recommendations from the Michigan Food Policy Council and the Michigan Poverty Task Force to support people made vulnerable to food insecurity.</i></p> <p><i>Strategy FS-10: Leverage public-private partnerships and local coalitions to address systemic food access issues.</i></p>		
<p>Initiative FS-10.0.1: Partner with the Food Bank Council of Michigan (FBCM) to provide funding for a pilot program that offers home delivery of charitable fresh and shelf-stable foods through the DoorDash courier service.</p>	<p><i>These strategies are currently in the early stages of development, and we are actively working on their progress. More updates will be shared as they become available.</i></p>	
<p>Initiative FS-10.0.2: Partner with community-based organizations, including the Detroit Food Policy Council, to work with local stores to stock WIC-approved items.</p>		

Summary of Next Steps

SDOH Strategy Phase 1 Food Stability initiatives have achieved several successes and have implemented various strategies to strengthen and simplify connections for families to food and nutrition safety net programs. However, certain initiatives face barriers due to staffing, funding limitations, and policy alignment. It is crucial to address these barriers and continue supporting ongoing initiatives while advocating for policy changes and expanding partnerships to ensure the success of these food stability initiatives. These barriers will be examined and resolved if possible. Data barriers were noted by several program leaders. The MDHHS Policy and Planning Office will proactively seek opportunities to address data gaps through partnerships.

There is an opportunity to explore the connection between Phase I Food Security Initiatives and Phase II Structural Interventions. The Policy and Planning Office will convene meetings with MDHHS program areas as well as statewide food and housing partners to prioritize next steps. Additionally, the initiatives and strategy will be evaluated by a third party.

April 2023

Phase I Housing Stability and Food Security Initiatives Progress Report Webinar

May 2023

SDOH Steering Committee will discuss FY24 food and housing priorities

June 2023

Establish Food Security and Housing Stability Work Groups





SUMMARY REPORT

Phase I Food Security Priorities

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) does not discriminate against any individual or group on the basis of race, national origin, color, sex, disability, religion, age, height, weight, familial status, partisan considerations, or genetic information. Sex-based discrimination includes, but is not limited to, discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, and pregnancy.