Overview

Since FFY 2013, the University of New England has implemented Maine SNAP-Ed with the goal of helping SNAP-eligible participants eat healthy on a budget through nutrition education and social marketing. Under contract with the State of Maine—DHHS OFI, Altarum has served as the external evaluator for Maine Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) since 2013.

Objective

Altarum assessed awareness, perceived value, and barriers to accessing Maine SNAP-Ed direct education classes among Maine SNAP recipients.

Study Design, Settings, Participants

A cross-sectional telephone survey was conducted using a list of adult Maine SNAP recipients provided by the State of Maine—DHHS OFI.

Measurable Outcome/Analysis

Respondents were asked about awareness, perceived value, and barriers to participation in SNAP-Ed direct education classes. Results were weighted to reflect characteristics of Maine SNAP recipients. Descriptive statistics and 95% confidence intervals were calculated to identify significant differences between groups.

Results

Approximately half of Maine SNAP recipients (49%) were aware of Maine SNAP-Ed. Many SNAP recipients (45%) learned about SNAP-Ed classes through other assistance programs (e.g., WIC). A majority (61%) of SNAP recipients who had taken a Maine SNAP-Ed class reported that the program helped them plan a healthy meal and a majority reported making healthy changes (Figure 1). Interest in learning to eat healthy was high with 72% of SNAP recipients “very interested” or “somewhat interested” in learning how to eat healthy. Though few have participated in a Maine SNAP-Ed class, a large proportion of SNAP recipients are interested in learning to eat healthier, though few have participated in a Maine SNAP-Ed class, which presents continued opportunities to recruit new adults for program participation. Most SNAP recipients (60% versus 44%) had heard of one or more Maine SNAP-Ed classes. Many (45%) learned about SNAP-Ed classes through other assistance programs (e.g., WIC). Those who had taken a SNAP-Ed class were asked to select from a list any actions they had taken after participation and a majority reported making healthy changes (Figure 1).

Conclusions

Interest and Barriers to Participation

Interest in how to eat healthy was high with 72% of SNAP recipients “very interested” or “somewhat interested” in learning how to eat healthy. Only 7% had participated in a Maine SNAP-Ed class. Barriers to participation among those who had not taken a class included: being unaware that nutrition education classes were offered (52%), difficulty with the locations (43%), disbelieving classes would change behaviors (40%), and being too busy (35%). About 4 in 10 (41%) who had not participated were uninterested in taking a class.

Preferred Communication Channels

SNAP recipients were asked about their preferred channels to receive information about nutrition or activities (Figure 2). The majority of respondents preferred to have information mailed to their home (84%), disseminated through their doctor, dentist or healthcare provider (79%), provided at grocery stores or in grocery store bags (74%), or distributed at food banks and pantries (54%). Interestingly, messaging through social media (30%) and online ads (23%) were the least preferred modes of communication across all age cohorts.