

Abstract

Background

Contracted by the State of Maine—Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office for Family Independence (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 Maine 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%) recognized one or more of Maine SNAP-Ed's direct education classes by name. Only 7% of SNAP recipients had taken a Maine SNAP-Ed direct education class. However, most SNAP recipients (72%) were “somewhat” or “very interested” in learning how to eat healthy. Those who had taken a Maine SNAP-Ed class reported that the program helped them plan healthy meals for themselves and their family (96%), try a new recipe (91%), and think about making healthier food choices (91%). Barriers to participation mentioned by those who had not taken a Maine SNAP-Ed 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%). Approximately 4 in 10 who had not participated (41%) were uninterested in taking a nutrition education class.

Conclusions

The majority of Maine SNAP recipients are aware of SNAP-Ed and interested in learning to eat healthy. Maine SNAP-Ed may be able to increase program participation by addressing identified barriers.

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 during this period, collecting data to understand the behaviors of the general SNAP population in Maine. Surveys conducted by Altarum in FFY 2015 and FFY 2016 were compared to findings from a follow-up survey conducted in FFY 2018.

Objectives

The survey instrument was designed to measure SNAP participants’:

- ▲ Awareness of Maine SNAP-Ed programming and services
- ▲ Perceived value of Maine SNAP-Ed



Methods

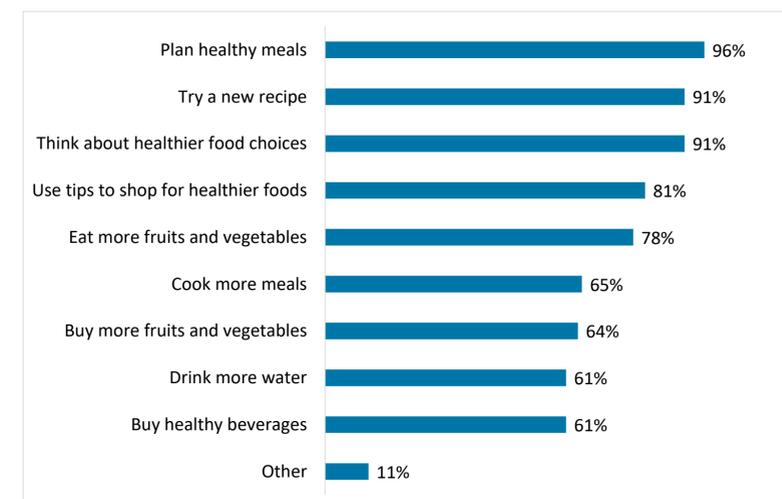
Altarum developed and administered a cross-sectional telephone survey to a representative sample of SNAP recipients in Maine. Key measures were used to assess respondents’ awareness and perceived value of Maine SNAP-Ed, barriers to participation, and preferred communication channels. Additional demographic information was gathered including age, gender, race, ethnicity, level of education, and participation in assistance programs. The survey results were weighted to reflect the actual population characteristics of SNAP recipients. Descriptive statistics and 95% confidence intervals were calculated to identify significant differences between groups.

Results

Awareness of Maine SNAP-Ed

A total of 601 Maine SNAP recipients participated in the telephone survey with almost half (49%) having heard of Maine SNAP-Ed, consistent with previous years. Mothers with children, a key segment of the target audience, had significantly higher awareness than other SNAP recipients (60% versus 44%). A larger percentage (61%) of SNAP recipients 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).

Figure 1. Healthy Actions Taken after a SNAP-Ed Class/Course



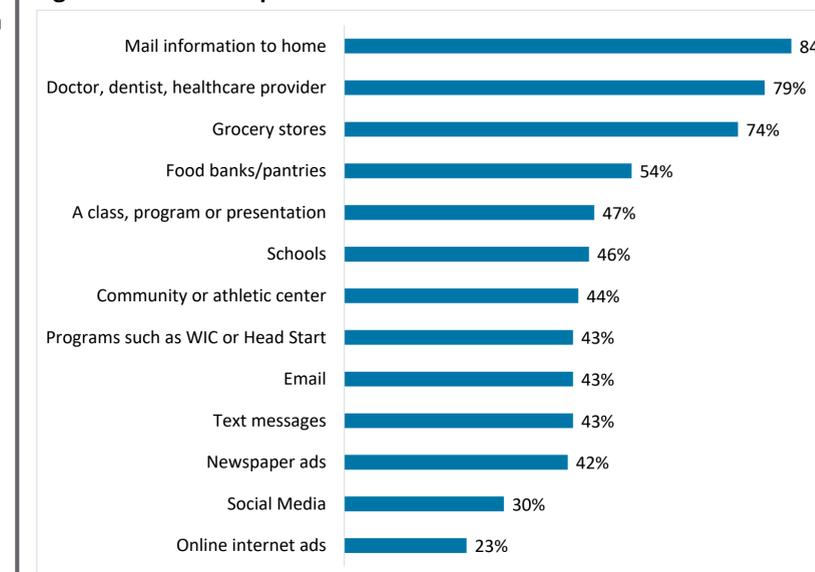
Interest and Barriers to Participation

Interest in learning 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.

Figure 2. SNAP Recipients’ Preferred Communication Channels



Conclusions

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 participation. Those who have taken Maine SNAP-Ed classes demonstrated one or more healthy behaviors after course completion. Maine SNAP-Ed may be able to increase program participation by addressing identified barriers and using preferred channels of communication to reach the target audience.