Abstract

Background The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Farm Bill) has refocused SNAP-Ed reporting to include and prioritize data and information on education, policy, and systems (PSE) interventions. This transformation was influenced by the Farm Bill’s emphasis on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Education (SNAP-Ed) programming activities, which are intended to improve outcomes for SNAP participants. SNAP-Ed is a federal program implemented by state agencies and non-profits to promote successful participation in SNAP and to improve the health of those who participate. This program is a unique system governance structure, which includes a multi-state, multi-organizational network with a wide range of stakeholders and accountability requirements. The purpose of this study was to synthesize current research on the practice of SNAP-Ed reporting to better understand trends and opportunities for improvement.

Objective Synthesize and communicate the methods used by CDSS and its SIAs to aggregate and report their SNAP-Ed data in accordance with the Farm Bill and the requirements of PSE data reporting.

Study Design, Settings, Participants PSE: CFHL used an online reporting system to collect data on PSE sites, ensuring that all SIAs were collecting the same information which could then be aggregated at the state level. Direct education: The Public Health Institute Center for Wellness and Nutrition (PHI CWN) reviewed all surveys used by SIAs and identified common questions that could be aggregated. Participants in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2018 were 3,641 adults and 3,988 children who participated in CFHL programs and completed matched pre-post surveys whose questions could be aggregated. Statistical analyses were selected that were appropriate for the data and permitted computation of effect sizes to measure the magnitude of reported changes.

Measurable Outcome/Analysis A review of the shifts in methodology CFHL enacted to aggregate analyses and improve overall research methods to be in line with the Farm Bill and Evidence Act.

Conclusion CFHL has a process for aggregating data that is in line with the Farm Bill may inform other states’ aggregation approaches.

Background The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Farm Bill) along with the Evidence Act of 2018, have emphasized the need for using an electronic data reporting system, ensuring data and improving data quality. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) was tasked with planning a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—Education (SNAP-Ed) program. In California, the SNAP-Ed program is known as CalFresh Healthy Living (CFHL) and is overseen by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). CFHL improves the health of Californians through education and healthy community changes and is implemented by four state implementing agencies (SIA). In 2016, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service Western Regional Office instructed CalFresh Healthy Living (CFHL) (California’s SNAP-Ed program) to synthesize results from four state implementing agencies (SIAs) and 138 local implementing agencies while reducing the reporting burden. The purpose of this study was to synthesize the statewide results using aggregated data.

Measurable Outcome/Analysis Switching to a centralized and electronic reporting system like PERS and reporting data is not an easy task, nor one that happens quickly. Given the size and complexity of CFHL, it was important to phase in the SIAs to start aggregating and reporting data in PERS. Subsequently, phases of direct education and policy systems (PSE) interventions were included in their reporting. For direct education, CFHL’s evaluation work group (EWG) was requested to assist in this process. The EWG consists of at least one representative from each SIA as well as a CFHL and is currently responsible for developing project indicators and to develop a comprehensive data collection plan. Additionally, they have identified cross-situational issues during PERS adoption. The EWG provided a venue for SIAs to discuss how they defined their work and how they recorded it into PERS. Therefore, EWG not only aided in the implementation of PERS, but it also helped to improve the quality of the data being entered. EWG was able to operationally define concepts such as sites (a unique address at which a PSE occurs) and PSE (a unique combination of a site and setting such as a preschool at 123 Main Street or an elementary school at the same address).

In 2016, two of the four SIAs, participated in the pilot of using PERS to record some of their PSE program data. In 2017, the remaining two SIAs began using PERS to record their PSE data. The ability to enter PERS data in 2017 was facilitated by the work done by CDSS (2016) in CA’s first-ever aggregation of CA PSE data. The work done by CDSS relied on extensive consultation with EWG and substantial coordination to define concepts like sites and PSEs (a unique combination of a site and setting such as a preschool at 123 Main Street or an elementary school at the same address).

Two challenges for aggregating the pre/post survey data from direct education collected by the SIAs were identified. Each SIA used a mix of different surveys and up until 2018, no assessment had been done to determine which of the surveys were used by multiple SIAs in order to combine the data. PHI CWN and CDSS conducted an extensive review of DE surveys used by the SIAs resulting in identifying the public health report forms that the SIAs used in order to address a SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework indicator for the 2018 SNAP-Ed annual report. The second challenge was the different methods used to record the pre/post survey data. In 2018, all SIAs used PERS to record their DE process data, but only one SIA used PERS to record their PSE process data, while the remaining SIAs used custom templates outside of PERS to record their pre/post survey data. In order to combine the data, PHI CWN used a statistical programming language to clean and merge data. The use of the code for merging the data was not available for all SIAs, as different SIAs had different methods to manipulate data manipulation skill that may not be appropriate for all SNAP-Ed implementers seeking to aggregate. However, this approach is consistent with contemporary thinking in the SNPA evaluation community that constructs “systems thinking” broadly.

The important first step was to ensure that all users were entering data into PERS the same way. Starting in 2018, all of California’s SIAs have fully implemented PERS for their SNAP-Ed reporting, satisfying the requirements of the Farm Bill by using an electronic data reporting system and providing a process for aggregating the data. The process of implementing PERS for all SIAs was a huge improvement to data quality and ensured that all data were consistent and that the results of analyses were meaningful.

Results Starting in 2018, all of California’s SIAs have fully implemented PERS for their SNAP-Ed reporting, satisfying the requirements of the Farm Bill by using an electronic data reporting system and providing a process for aggregating the data. The process of implementing PERS for all SIAs was a huge improvement to data quality and ensured that all data were consistent and that the results of analyses were meaningful.

Conclusion and Implications Satisfying the requirements of the Farm Bill required intentional planning and support and leadership from CDSS.

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References


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