College Students Are at Risk for Food and Nutrition Insecurity

An SNEB position paper published in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior urges health educators and professionals to improve policies, systems, environment, and research to alleviate food insecurity for college students and promote nutrition security among collegiates.

Philadelphia, October 9, 2023 – The Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) holds its founded position that college students, especially those from underserved communities, are at risk for food and nutrition insecurity. The position paper shared in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, published by Elsevier, reinforces this stance with research, measurement, and potential policy solutions.

SNEB President Yenory Hernandez Garbanzo, PhD, said, “This position paper sheds light on the critical issue of food insecurity among college students. It emphasizes the importance of a systemic approach and the active involvement of students in advocating for their right to food and contributing to healthier diets for both individuals and the planet. Food and nutrition education is undoubtedly one powerful tool to drive this transformation.”

Lead author Meg Bruening, PhD, MPH, RD, Department of Nutritional Sciences, The College of Health and Human Development, The Pennsylvania State University, explained, “Food insecurity is inconsistent access to foods, whereas nutrition insecurity is the inconsistent access and availability of foods for the maintenance of healthy bodies and support of disease prevention and management.”
Food and nutrition security is a result of complex socioecological factors. For example, students have time and resource scarcity and must sometimes choose between food and other expenses.

Dr. Bruening noted, “College campuses have been described as food deserts, perpetuating the disparity in the consistent food access for emerging adults pursuing higher education, with limited access to healthy foods.”

Food insecurity disparities are magnified for collegiates. Research has shown that they are associated with lifestyle habits, including unhealthy dietary habits and patterns, and less sleep. Students experiencing food insecurity have three times greater odds of enduring mental health issues than those who are food secure.

Campus-based programs that provide food directly to students in need, like food pantries, are the most common mechanisms being used to address food insecurity among students. Unfortunately, these programs often lack evaluation systems, are strained for support, and are short on infrastructure.

Dr. Bruening commented, “There have also been campus task forces and committees to address food insecurities at colleges nationwide. The formation of a task forces marks an early action phase that can serve as a critical formative step in engaging key stakeholders, assessing opportunities and challenges, coordinating action, and raising awareness across campus and university systems.”
Action is needed to make measurable differences in food and nutrition security for collegiates. Based on the best evidence currently available, recommendations include, but are not limited to:

1. High quality research on food insecurity assessment measures and screening tools.
2. Ongoing national surveillance of food insecurity for college students.
3. More rigorous research for inference on how it impacts health and other outcomes over time.
4. Intervention for subpopulations that are consistently underserved.
5. Improved collaboration across disciplines supporting college students.
6. Investments to scale food assistance programs for those who need them.
7. Improved awareness of existing resources available to students who experience food insecurity.
8. More emphasis on the unique needs of emerging adult health.

Dr. Bruening concluded, “We need to expand our training of future nutrition educators on policy, systems, and environmental change to address the root causes of food and nutrition security.”

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**Notes for editors**


The article is openly available at https://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046(23)00434-7/fulltext.

Full text of the article is also available to credentialed journalists upon request; contact Eileen Leahy at +1 732 238 3628 or jnebmedia@elsevier.com to obtain a copy. To schedule an interview with the author(s), please contact Meg Bruening, PhD, MPH, RD, mmb203@psu.edu.

This Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior position was adopted by the SNEB Board on July 11, 2022.

An audio podcast featuring an interview with Meg Bruening, PhD, MPH, RD, and other information for journalists are available at https://www.jneb.org/content/media. Excerpts from the podcast may be reproduced by the media with permission from Eileen Leahy.

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The *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (JNEB), the official journal of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB), is a refereed, scientific periodical that serves as a resource for all professionals with an interest in nutrition education and dietary/physical activity behaviors. The purpose of JNEB is to document and disseminate original research, emerging issues, and practices relevant to nutrition education and behavior worldwide and to promote healthy, sustainable food choices. It supports the society’s efforts to disseminate innovative nutrition education strategies, and communicate information on food, nutrition, and health issues to students, professionals, policy makers, targeted audiences, and the public.

The *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* features articles that provide new insights and useful findings related to nutrition education research, practice, and policy. The content areas of JNEB reflect the diverse interests of health, nutrition, education, Cooperative Extension, and other professionals.
working in areas related to nutrition education and behavior. As the Society’s official journal, JNEB also includes occasional policy statements, issue perspectives, and member communications. [www.jneb.org]

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