The Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) Issues Its Position on How to Address Emergency Food and Nutrition Needs in Disaster Preparedness

A position paper published in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior identifies opportunities and provides recommendations on strengthening healthy food readiness in disaster relief programs.

Philadelphia, July 10, 2024 – Despite escalating disaster frequency and severity, guidance for addressing emergency food and nutrition needs is limited. However, existing literature offers insights on how to effectively address emergency food and nutrition assistance. A recent position paper issued by the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, published by Elsevier, states that for effective recovery from and resilience to disasters, it is essential that impacted individuals and communities have access to safe, nutritious, and culturally and contextually appropriate foods and beverages, and receive emergency-related food and nutrition education before, during, and after a disaster.

Lead author Sheila Fleischhacker, PhD, JD, RDN, Georgetown University, explained, “Disasters limit the ability of survivors to access sufficient, safe, and nutritious foods and beverages. These challenges are even more problematic for communities that face inequitable access to retail food outlets and safe drinking water before a disaster. Even if a retail food outlet is accessible, culturally and contextually appropriate foods and beverages might not be available or affordable.”

The position paper extensively drew from a diverse array of resources, incorporating research articles, studies, and other relevant materials concerning disaster relief programs and their effectiveness. These
sources provided comprehensive insights into various aspects of disaster response and recovery efforts, including but not limited to the assessment of existing relief initiatives, evaluations of their efficacy, and identification of best practices. By synthesizing findings from a wide range of scholarly and practical sources, the position paper offers an understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in addressing emergency food and nutrition needs during disasters.

The position paper proposes a multifaceted approach to enhance emergency-related food and nutrition education across all phases of disaster management. Recommendations include improving communication and outreach by identifying and disseminating best practices tailored to diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, fostering community engagement and locally driven preparedness involves compiling community needs, building local capacity, and emphasizing nutritional considerations within disaster preparedness initiatives. Training current professionals and the next generation of public health leaders involves integrating emergency nutrition components into interdisciplinary disaster management curricula, emphasizing principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. These recommendations collectively aim to bolster disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts by embedding food and nutrition considerations within research, policy, and practice.

The frequency, duration, and intensity of disasters are on the rise, frequently disrupting food systems and exacerbating food insecurity, especially impacting historically underserved communities. While nutrition emergencies often receive insufficient attention, initiatives should strive to enhance food and nutrition security during disaster response and recovery. Throughout all stages of a disaster, those involved in these efforts can play a pivotal role in emphasizing the significance of nutrition education and other interventions to encourage healthy eating habits.
Dr. Fleischhacker commented, "Although nutrition emergencies tend to be understudied, emerging efforts are working to advance food and nutrition security during disaster response and recovery. Before, during, and after a disaster, those who engage in this work, among other allies, can help elevate the importance of nutrition education and other strategies to promote healthy eating behaviors through research, policy, and practice."

Notes for editors
The article is “Position of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior: The Importance of Emergency-Related Food and Nutrition Education Before, During, and After A Disaster," by Sheila Fleischhacker, PhD, JD, RDN; Uriyoán Colón-Ramos, ScD, MPA; Lindsey Haynes-Maslow, PhD, MHA and Lauren Clay, PhD, MPH (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2024.04.008). It appears in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, Volume 56, Issue 7 (July 2024), published by Elsevier.

The article is openly available for 90 days at https://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046(24)00082-4/fulltext.

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Full text of the article is also available to credentialed journalists upon request; contact Eileen Leahy at +1 732 406 1313 or jnebmedia@elsevier.com to obtain a copy or additional information. To schedule an interview with the author(s), please contact Sheila Fleischhacker, PhD, JD, RDN, Georgetown University Law Center, Washington, DC, at sheilaflly9@gmail.com.

An audio podcast featuring an interview with Sheila Fleischhacker, PhD, JD, RDN, and other information for journalists are available at 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, policymakers, 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.
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