

MAKING THE HEALTHY CHOICE THE EASY CHOICE: THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTHY FOOD INCENTIVES IN FOOD BENEFIT PROGRAMS

The Problem:

Accessing healthy food can be difficult, especially for those who struggle with the typical high cost of healthier foods.

There have been successful efforts in recent years through the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) grant program to develop new pathways to healthier food, including incentives to purchase healthier foods like fruits and vegetables.

However, while such efforts have made great strides in encouraging eating more nutritious foods, the program relies on a paper voucher system that is confusing for the customer to use, antiquated and perpetuates stigma against people who use food benefit programs.

Solutions for Washington State:

To maximize utilization of healthy food incentive programs, Washington needs to upgrade the food benefit electronic system.

Such upgrades will help reduce barriers that prevent people from accessing healthy food incentives, such as losing paper vouchers and losing benefit balance if the full voucher amount isn't spent. This will in turn reduce stigma and increase consumption of fruits and vegetables.

The Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition and Northwest Harvest requests an investment in technology upgrades to food benefit programs that allow healthy food incentives to seamlessly be added back onto their food benefit (EBT) card so they can be accessed just like other food benefits.

Current Statewide Nutrition Incentive Program at a Glance:

Fruit and Vegetable Incentives Under the Award: \$3.45 million

Incentives Spent (4/15-6/18): \$2.3 mil*

Number of Participating Outlets:

90 Farmers Markets
175 Grocery Stores
15 Health Systems

Redemption Rate for Grocery Store Incentives: 21%

Program Participant Responses:

75% reported that food in their home was less likely to run out
72% reported managing their health conditions better

* Federal dollars for the grocery store incentives ran out in June 2018. Remaining incentive dollars for Farmers Market Fresh Bucks and Fruit & Vegetable Prescriptions are on track to run out before the end of 2019.

For more information on the *Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition* contact Victor Colman, vic@copcwa.org 360.878.2543

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