



From Fear to Trust

Community-led Solutions to Increase Food Access in Immigrant Communities

Executive Summary

In 2019, the U.S. federal government officially expanded the “public charge” definition to include immigrants who receive assistance with housing, nutrition, healthcare, and other benefits. This **anti-immigrant policy caused historic levels of direct harm and hunger for immigrant families and U.S. citizen children**, with millions forgoing health and nutrition benefits. The rule was challenged in courts and reversed in 2021 and further protections were added in 2022, making it explicit that the use of nutrition, housing programs and healthcare programs at a doctor’s office, clinic, or hospital is not considered in public charge determinations. However, the “chilling effect” of the 2019 public charge rule and the ever-shifting landscape of federal and state immigration policies have created an **environment of instability, confusion, fear, and isolation within immigrant communities**. This is especially concerning considering that the overwhelming majority of children of immigrants (87%) are U.S. citizens. Many of these children are eligible to receive resources provided by our nation’s federal child nutrition programs—including free and reduced-price school breakfast and lunch, free summer meals, and monthly SNAP and WIC benefits.

Each month, grantee organizations distributed **254,000 pounds of food**, fed **12,000 families**, and directly assisted **65,000 individuals and 31,000 families**.

“The grant funding we received was instrumental to help educate and spread the word on the many benefits that are available to our families. SNAP is misunderstood and there is much stigma in the community when it comes to applying for its benefits. But we feel that the work that we did had a tremendous impact in thawing the chill.”

– Organization in Florida

Immigrant advocates and community-based organizations responded by **stepping up their efforts to feed families and rebuild trust in communities**. In 2022, Share Our Strength – No Kid Hungry invested more than \$1 million to support 17 **predominantly Latino-serving organizations’** efforts to increase SNAP enrollment and provide food for families in need. The Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research (LZC) led a participatory evaluation to learn how grantee organizations fed families and fostered an environment of safety and belonging.

This report uplifts the **strategies** of Latino-led and immigrant-serving nonprofit organizations, showing how they worked with families to increase access to basic food needs and federal nutrition programs. We identified a set of **promising practices** that were most effective in assisting and empowering families who were fearful of jeopardizing their status and stability in the United States.

Grantee Organizations’ Promising Practices

- Offer stigma-free services
- Provide culturally responsive services and culturally relevant food
- Ensure low barriers to SNAP enrollment and food access and meet community members where they are
- Hire and trust community-embedded, bilingual staff and *promotores*
- Show up consistently

This report also demonstrates how harmful public charge narratives and policy contexts directly threaten the food security and health of immigrant families. Millions of children are hungry in this resource-abundant nation in part because we have not designed equitable and humane policies to ensure that everyone has the basic resources needed to survive. Scarcity- and shame-based anti-immigrant narratives serve to uphold the status quo and prevent change. Grantees utilized a range of strategies to **develop positive counter-narratives** and embed them into their work with families and in the wider community. **Aligning policy advocacy and narrative change can heal harm and support immigrant well-being.**

Positive Counter-Narrative Themes

- Abundance
- Independence and autonomy
- Belonging and contributing
- Rights and power

Harmful Narrative Themes

- Scarcity
- Shame in being a “public charge”
- Undeservedness / othering
- Criminalization

We strongly recommend that funders, government agencies, and legislators continue to support and expand the deployment of resources to alleviate hunger and meet the basic needs of immigrant families in the United States. Millions of U.S. citizen children live in mixed-status families and their well-being is vulnerable to shifting political tides. Immigrants contribute to the United States in numerous ways, including billions of dollars in taxes annually. We are stronger as a society when immigrant families are supported and able to thrive.

We saw the tangible results of the efforts of these Latino community-based organizations in their communities—families fed, networks built, trust forged. Ending hunger in the United States requires dedication and intentionality, policy and narrative change, community and cooperation. It requires all of us.



Recommendations to Support the Health and Well-being of Immigrant Families

- Support community-based organizations that are meeting immigrants' food and nutritional needs by providing annual funding
- Allocate more funding to community-based organizations specifically working on SNAP applications, given the extra work they do to provide culturally and linguistically responsive support to immigrant families
- Fund community-based organizations to conduct narrative change work
- Provide flexible, long-term funding to align with the pace of social change
- Allocate government resources and hire more employees to eliminate the SNAP enrollment backlog and prevent future occurrences
- Simplify the SNAP enrollment process
- Fund a targeted national media campaign to combat misinformation

Read the Full Report: immigranthealth.org/from-fear-to-trust



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