

SNAP-Ed Focus Groups with Adults

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BACKGROUND



The goal of SNAP-Education (SNAP-Ed) is to help New Mexico adults make healthy food choices and engage in physical activity that is consistent with the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans and Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. In order to assess the effectiveness of SNAP-Ed at achieving this goal, we planning to conduct the SNAP-Ed Adult Healthy Habits Evaluation. The evaluation includes three phases: 1) formative research, 2) pilot testing, and 3) conducting the Adult Healthy Habits Survey. The current report addresses phase one of the SNAP-Ed NM Adult Healthy Habits Evaluation.

Purpose: The purpose of phase one was to conduct formative research to identify the best methods to use when surveying New Mexico adults (ages 18 to 60) and older adults (ages 61 and older) about their eating and physical activity behaviors. Specifically, we gathered feedback about the survey format, survey length, survey questions, and messaging to increase survey response rates. Information gathered from the focus groups will be used to refine the SNAP-Ed NM Adult Healthy Habits survey to increase its acceptability, reach, and feasibility.

FORMATIVE RESEARCH/ FOCUS GROUPS

METHODS

- Four focus groups with adults receiving SNAP-Ed services through New Mexico State University's ICAN program
- UNM PRC Evaluation Team used a semi-structured interview guide
- Focus group sessions lasted 30-60 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed
- Analysis was conducted using NVivo software to identify themes and subthemes
- Primary and secondary coders analyzed each focus group transcript and developed summaries
- Participants received a \$35 WalMart gift card for their participation

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Focus Group Participants

	<i>n</i>
Age	
18 - 24	2
25 - 34	3
35 - 44	2
45 - 54	4
55 - 64	10
65 - 74	13
75+	7
Missing	1
Sex	
Female	29
Male	12
Missing	1
Hispanic Origin	
Yes	16
No	21
Prefer Not to Specify	3
Missing	2
Race	
AI/AN/I	13
Asian, Pacific Islander	0
Black, African American	0
White, Anglo	16
Other	10
Missing	3
Highest Level of Education	
Less than High School	8
High School or Equivalent	12
Some College	10
Bachelor's degree or Higher	12
County	
Lincoln	13
McKinley	10
Roosevelt	11
Santa Fe	8

Note. AI/AN/I = American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous

Participants

- **Counties involved:** McKinley, Roosevelt, Lincoln, and Santa Fe County
- **Number of participants:** 30
- **The majority (71.5%) were ages 55 and older**
- **Two-thirds (69.0%) were female**
- **More than one-third (38.1%) self-identified as Hispanic/Latino/Latinx**
- **Nearly one-third (31.0%) self-identified as Native American**
- **One-quarter (26.2%) self-identified as white, non-Hispanic**

RESULTS

FORMAT AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE SURVEY

A majority of the focus group participants prefer pen and paper surveys, conducted in person, and during class time. Alternatively, participants felt it could work to have the survey in person in places where people already gathered (e.g., senior center, post office, grocery store). Participants felt it would be helpful to have somebody facilitating the survey, since people might need assistance. Due to vision issues, participants recommended having text larger and bolded. Very few participants were open to receiving the surveys by mail or to taking the survey online. If the survey is conducted electronically, participants recommended having the survey questions come up one at a time rather than all at once.

“...whoever was giving the survey, if they could have somebody there helping along because some people can't read or write or their vision's not good or things like that...”

DECISION: The survey will be conducted in person, using pen and paper, as part of a class, facilitated by an educator, whenever possible. Questions will be larger font and bolded. The facilitator will assist with the surveys as needed. An online version will be available for use. Questions in the electronic version will come up one at a time.

RESULTS



LIMITATIONS TO CONSIDER

There were several limitations that need to be considered when developing surveys and making them accessible to adults and older adults. Several participants were hearing impaired or needed help understanding what was said during the discussion. Some communication was done through written notes. A few participants needed the survey questions read to them due to visual impairment. Among older adults, a few participants had memory difficulties and weren't sure they would be able to answer the questions accurately. Across the focus groups there were individuals that could not remember or were not sure how to respond to demographic questions including the name of the county they lived in, whether or not they were Hispanic, and in one case, her age. One participant was a Navajo speaker and required a translator.

CONSIDERATIONS: Participants may be living with disabilities or other limitations that make it difficult to complete the survey on their own. Using best practices regarding vision and hearing impaired as well as having individuals to assist in survey administration is important. Additionally, the team needs to consider having the survey available in multiple languages including English, Spanish, Navajo and other languages spoken in New Mexico.

DECISION: Have surveys administered in person. Have the survey text large and bold print. Have the survey translated into multiple languages.

RESULTS

TIMEFRAME TO REMEMBER

When asked about the time frame for recalling information about their food consumption and physical activity, participants felt differently about the two. Participants felt it was easier to remember what they ate yesterday, but it was better to ask about physical activity over the past week. One participant said,

“So for me, I would say the main times when I’m getting good chunks of exercise would be on the weekends. So, I would be able to recall working out for two 30-minute sessions, whereas the eating you’re doing that all day every day. And so maybe it’s harder to keep track, but maybe just saying, “How many times did you have vegetables yesterday?”

One participant was concerned that ‘yesterday’ was not a representative range of time,

“...it seems like you’re saying like ‘yesterday’ and then you only have part of what a person eats ... not like for the whole week. But if you make it for the week you have more understanding of the health of the individual...”

As a result, some participants suggested using words like “typically” or “usually” to assess what a typical week looks like outside of special occasions.

CONSIDERATIONS: Prior research shows that ‘usually’ is less accurate as people tend to overestimate their fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity. Consider including a question that asks if yesterday was a typical day.

DECISION: Keep food questions asking about yesterday. Physical activity question can stay with last week.

RESULTS

WHAT PARTICIPANTS LIKED ABOUT THE SURVEY AND WHAT PARTICIPANTS DID NOT LIKE ABOUT THE SURVEY



LIKED ABOUT THE SURVEY

Most of the focus group participants liked the survey and thought that it was simple, had a good length, questions were easy to understand, no fancy words, and that it gave more than a couple of options. One participant expressed that he is learning from the survey. Another participant also mentioned that it was good that a question about education was included.

DID NOT LIKE ABOUT THE SURVEY

No focus group participants had issues with the subject matter of the survey (healthy eating and physical activity). Participants did voice displeasure about the demographic questions.

A few people did not like the part of the survey about education level and income. Some participants did not want to share information about their age. One participant raised a concern about the question on race and ethnicity,

“If you look at my survey, you’ll notice that I put down-- your first question was if you’re Hispanic. I put human. On your second question about whether you’re white, black, orange, gray, green - I put it does not make any difference. So, I feel that we get that asked on every single survey we take. All the time. Nobody can explain why we’re asked that.”

DECISION: Add an explanation as to why we request demographic information.

Why are we asking demographic information? We want to make sure that we are reaching all the peoples of New Mexico. Additionally, we would like to provide those who participate in Snap-Ed programming with culturally relevant recipes and nutrition options. Lastly, we want to make sure that we are presenting information in a way that is understandable and relevant.



RESULTS

WORDING OF QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS NOT WORDED WELL/CONFUSING:

- › The question about drinking sodas did not have an option for people who drink them rarely “like a special occasion type of thing”.
- › Participants were unsure about coffee creamer and if that should be included with sugary beverages.
- › Participants thought it was better to ask about the variety of vegetables than the specific types.
- › The question regarding red vegetables and leafy vegetables were too long and hard to understand.
- › Participants were not sure whether to count ranching work, yard work, and housework. For example, tasks like painting, mending fences, gardening, and ironing. If these are physical activity, they should be included as examples.

CONSIDERATIONS: Consider adding a smaller category to the soda question. Consider asking about the variety of vegetables instead of the specific types. Review questions 4 and 5 for changes. Consider adding additional types of exercise, particularly housework, yardwork, and farming/ranching work as physical activity.

DECISIONS: Delete questions about colors of vegetables and include questions about variety of fruits and vegetables. Add ‘less than once a week’ to the question about drinking sodas. Add a question about moderate exercise including housework, yardwork, gardening, ranching, etc.

RESULTS

LENGTH OF SURVEY AND INCENTIVES



LENGTH OF THE SURVEY

All of the focus group participants thought that the length of the survey was good. In general, participants felt that somewhere between 10 to 20 questions would work best. Participants thought it would take about 15 minutes to complete the survey.

DECISION: No need to reduce the length.

INCENTIVES

Participants were in agreement that incentives to complete the surveys would increase response rates – even small incentives. One participant stated,

“Incentives always work. I mean, no matter how small it is, it's a form of showing appreciation for taking your time to do something. It's always appreciated.”

Suggestions for types of incentives included kitchen tools such as spoons, spatulas, and kitchen towels. Several people also felt that healthy incentives were a good idea such as healthy snacks, stress balls, and exercise bands. A few people thought that a Walmart gift card or other type of gift card would be preferred. “Even a \$10 card to Subway, or something like that, would be an incentive.” Other items mentioned were grocery bags, aprons, pedometers, and planting seeds such as flower and vegetable seeds.

CONSIDERATIONS: Incentives cannot be valued at more than \$5 per USDA SNAP-Ed Guidance. SNAP-Ed funding does not allow for distribution of food.

DECISION: Purchase kitchen utensils, grocery bags, aprons, kitchen towels, pedometers, stress balls, exercise bands, or seeds for planting as incentives.



SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE SURVEY

Focus group participants provided several suggestions to improve the survey.

> **Vegetable questions should:**

- o Ask how many times a day instead of servings
- o Ask about variety vs specific types
- o Include more relevant veggies (e.g., chiles and cucumbers)
- o Focus on yesterday vs the last week

> **Physical activity questions need to ask about yard work, gardening, ranching**

> **Sugary beverage questions should ask about creamer instead of Frappuccinos**

> **Additional topics to consider including questions about are:**

- o Alcohol
- o Whole grains
- o Specific exercises
- o Health histories
- o Dietary restrictions
- o Nutrient intake

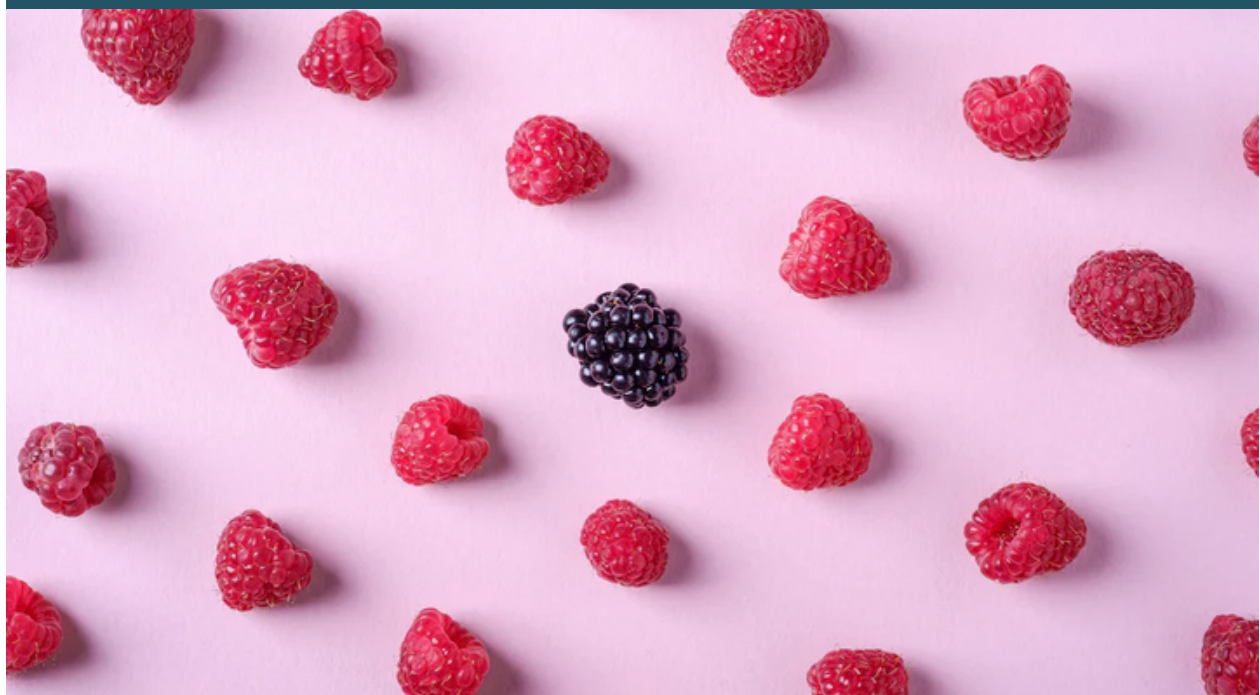
CONSIDERATIONS:

Some of the suggested questions are not relevant to what SNAP-Ed teaches (e.g., alcohol consumption). Additionally, we do not want to include health history data on these surveys. Questions about what they do for physical activity and what barriers they experience to exercise may be helpful for program planning. Few dietary restrictions would preclude the main messages of eating fruits and vegetables and drinking water instead of sugary beverages. More questions will lengthen the survey.

DECISION: The survey will be changed to reflect recommendations on changing existing questions. Questions will be added regarding moderate physical activity and types of activities.

SUMMARY

This formative evaluation, consisting of four focus groups with adults (18-60) and older adults (61+), was conducted as the first stage in an evaluation of the effects of SNAP-Ed on adult fruit and vegetable consumption, water and sugar-sweetened beverage consumption, and physical activity. The focus groups provided insight into how survey questions are understood, which terms may be more appropriate, and what methods can be used to increase participation and data validity. The results of the formative evaluation will be used for survey and protocol development and implementation of a pilot evaluation among adults receiving SNAP-Ed in New Mexico.





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