

Create Better Health (SNAP-Ed) Program Pivots after Funding Cuts and Government Shutdown

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After 26 years as Utah's implementing agency for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed), Utah State University Extension's Create Better Health program has transitioned to a hub structure. The model will provide a collaborative approach to advancing nutrition-secure communities in every county in Utah.

"For more than two decades, our team has partnered locally to make healthy living more accessible for everyone," said Lea Palmer, director and program manager for USU Extension's Create Better Health Hub program. "While the federal SNAP-Ed program has ended, our commitment to our communities has not. The hub allows us to coordinate efforts, grow partnerships, and keep nutrition and physical activity resources flowing to families, schools, worksites, and communities around the state."

Palmer said SNAP-Ed funds previously allocated will still be available to sponsor classes and activities through December 2025, and Create Better Health is actively seeking alternative sponsorships, grants, and donations to help fund the program.

"The shutdown has underscored the importance of having resilient, community-based systems in place," said Heidi LeBlanc, USU Extension Home and Community Department director. "Our new hub model is designed to be flexible and responsive, allowing us to continue serving families, even when federal systems are disrupted."

The added flexibility of the hub structure allows Create Better Health to respond more quickly to challenges Utahns are facing, LeBlanc said. Considering the current government shutdown, which has already affected federal workers and will impact Utahns who rely on SNAP and other federal programs, Create Better Health has increased its efforts to ensure that families continue receiving reliable information and support as they navigate food security uncertainty.

Create Better Health will continue to collaborate with partners in every county to:

- Teach in-person and online nutrition classes for all ages.
- Develop systems that increase access to healthy, affordable foods (e.g., produce incentives, food access mapping, gleaning, and garden projects).
- Conduct community needs assessments and share information.
- Collaborate on grants and technical assistance to strengthen local food systems.
- Expand access to meal planning, budgeting, safe physical activity, and food safety.

New programs provided through the hub include:

- SNAP Outreach. Create Better Health now leads SNAP Outreach services, helping eligible Utahns learn about, apply for, and maintain SNAP benefits with dignity and ease.
- National Nutrition Community Partner training for professionals, community leaders, influencers, and interested volunteers. No prior nutrition background is required. A "career explorations" version introduces high school students to community nutrition careers and service.
- Employee wellness and group programs. To build sustainability, Create Better Health is expanding worksite and group offerings through on-site/virtual nutrition workshops, employee community gardens, and family mealtime programs that strengthen health and connections at home.

Palmer said those interested can get involved by attending a class in person or online and sharing resources with their communities. They can find classes on the [Extension calendar](#) and search "Create Better Health." Organizations and partners can help co-design programs, sponsor a Create Better Health class series, request services, explore employee wellness, and join the partnership updates list.

Those in need of emergency food assistance can call 211 or visit 211Utah.org or Utahns Against Hunger.

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