



## Objective 2<sup>8</sup>

Increase participation in public food assistance programs among Coloradans who are eligible for them.



Reduce barriers to public food assistance enrollment and utilization.

<b>Key Investments</b>	Colorado Department of Human Services, Colorado Department of Education, Bondadosa, Colorado Food Cluster
<b>Total Investment</b>	\$6,069,437
<b>Defining Characteristic</b>	Shift from top-down outreach efforts to community- and equity-driven solutions that addressed structural barriers to public food assistance through systems advocacy and lived experience leadership.

CHF's strategy evolved from a statewide systems improvements and enrollment growth to confronting structural and racial inequities in public benefit systems. Over time, it prioritized community-informed, equity-rooted approaches, centering lived experience, supporting advocacy, and using its influence to shift power, policy, and practice to better serve impacted communities.

### Evolution

- Starting in 2019, CHF aimed to increase SNAP, WIC, and child nutrition program enrollment through large-scale outreach and state agency partnership, assuming improved awareness would drive uptake.
- When enrollment remained flat, CHF shifted its approach to address deeper structural barriers, such as administrative inefficiencies, language access, and cultural responsiveness, by supporting community-driven innovations and advocacy.
- Investments evolved to prioritize community-driven models and local coalition and Blueprint efforts (Objective 1) that successfully pushed for more equitable public benefit access, demonstrating greater impact than earlier state agency-focused strategies.


### Objective 2 Outcomes

While CHF's investments contributed to modest improvements, such as bolstering outreach infrastructure, supporting innovations, and raising awareness, the overall outcomes were limited.

- **Strengthened SNAP outreach infrastructure:** CHF played a role in building and strengthening Colorado's SNAP outreach infrastructure, indirectly contributing to an increase in SNAP enrollment during the investment period.

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on the evolution, outcomes, and lessons learned, refer to the [Objective 2](#) section in the Addendum.

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- **Enhanced access to child nutrition programs:** CHF provided support to make Colorado’s child nutrition program more accessible, culturally relevant, and responsive to local needs.
  - **WIC innovations faced systemic limitations:** Despite early enthusiasm and local capacity to implement WIC online ordering and delivery pilots, critical structural issues within the WIC system proved difficult to overcome.
  - **Reduced stigma and raised awareness:** Most of the funded barrier-reduction work across public food assistance programs focused on reducing stigma and improving awareness of programs such as SNAP, WIC, and school meal initiatives.
  - **Evolved state agency practices and capacity:** Targeted grants to state agencies enabled teams to undertake projects beyond their typical compliance and regulatory functions, filling critical gaps in outreach, branding, and training that otherwise would have remained unaddressed due to limited time, staffing, and resources.

## Lessons Learned

Over time, CHF refined its approach to improving access to public food assistance programs in response to the structural complexity of public systems and the mixed results of state-level investments.

- **Limits of state-led systems change:** Initial investments aimed at driving systems change from within state agencies were hampered by top-down bureaucracy, limited agility, and federal constraints that diluted equity efforts. CHF also underestimated the complexity and time intensity of systems-level innovations. Ultimately, without deeper structural and national reform or bolder alignment with equity-focused goals, the strategy struggled to deliver lasting, scalable impact.
- **Community advocacy as a catalyst:** Investments in local coalitions and field-building efforts like the Blueprint under Objective 1 emerged as more agile and effective.
- **Navigating the shift from state to community support:** As CHF shifted away from supporting state agencies, grantees faced challenges around communication, sustainability, and planning, with some noting that a lack of clear transition strategy and delayed communication hindered their ability to prepare for funding gaps or secure continued support.
- **Trade-offs of private funding in public systems:** Accepting private funding from CHF gave state agencies valuable flexibility to adapt and respond quickly, but also introduced logistical complexities, competing expectations, and emotional tensions as philanthropic support phased out.