



Background

Hunger Free Vermont's mission is to feed more Vermonters, teach the community about healthy food and nutrition and lead advocacy and education efforts to end hunger in Vermont. In Vermont 11.4% of all seniors are considered food insecure. To address this issue, Hunger Free Vermont has taken on the task of increasing enrollment in 3 Squares Vermont, the state food stamps program. 68% of people in VT who are eligible for 3SqVT are enrolled. Surprisingly, only 29.2% of eligible seniors are enrolled.

Our study focuses on the leaders of community organizations who impact seniors. Through focus groups we assessed their:

- Knowledge of the 3SqVT program
- Knowledge of senior enrollment and food insecurity
- Ideas about the barriers leading to low enrollment
- Solutions



Methods

Focus group

- Representatives from community, health care, home based, and religious organizations that work daily with seniors in Vermont were invited to participate via e-mail, phone, or referral.
- 17 of 34 invited organizations participated in three 90 minute focus groups of 4-9 participants; 15 standardized questions were discussed.

Data analysis

- Audio recording, data transcription, and observers.
- Solutions were categorized under one of three major categories: simplify application, educate, and advertise.

Results

"...I don't think people realize that 3 squares money is federal money that comes into VT that's not accounted for in the state budget, therefore if people realize that they can say "well, I'm doing my part to help VT's economy..."

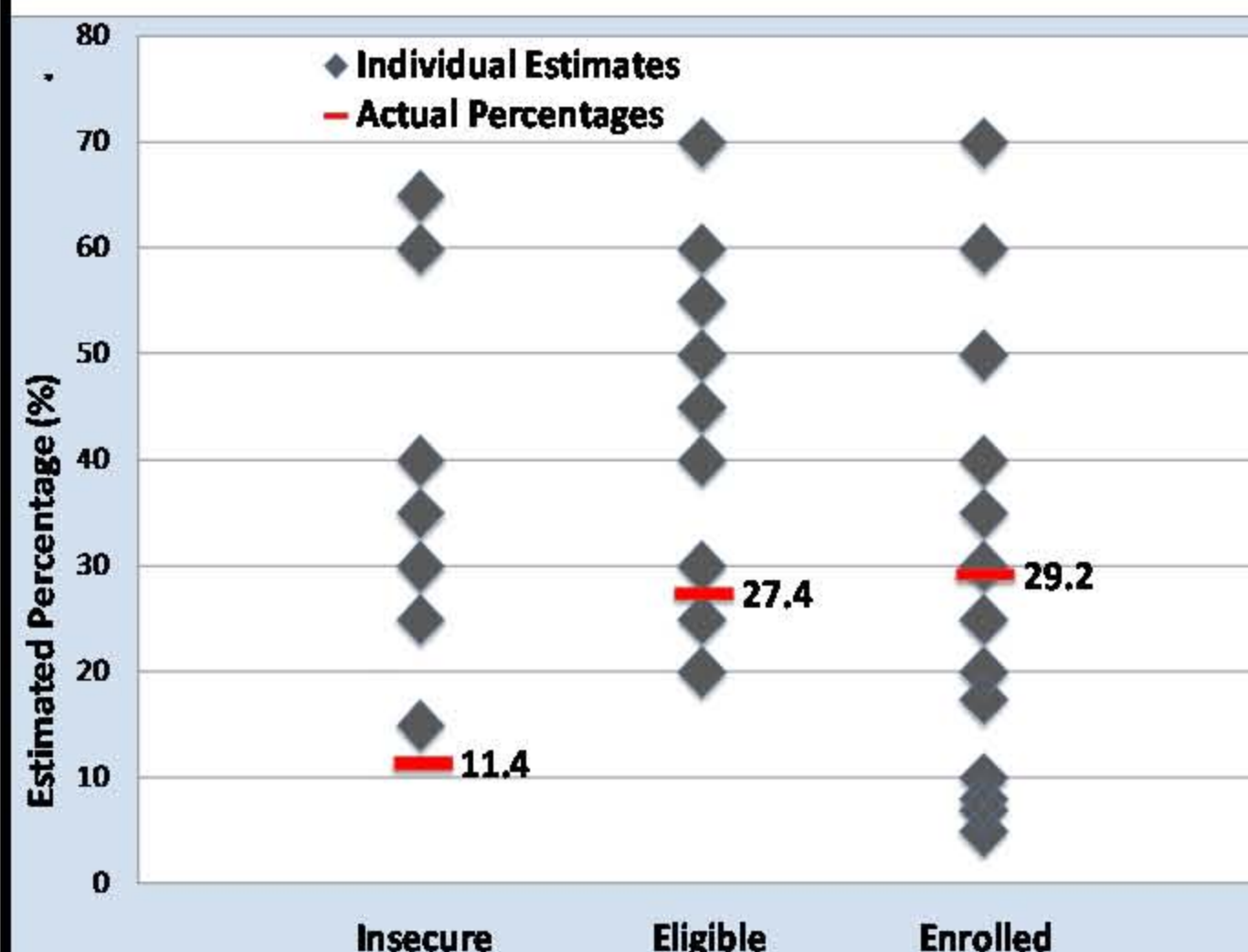


Figure 1: Focus group participant estimations of food insecurity, 3SquaresVT eligibility, and 3SquareVT enrollment of Vermont seniors.



Figure 2: What can be done to increase enrollment in 3SQVT? Answers provided from focus groups all fell within one of the following categories. Text in bold indicates examples that were mentioned in at least 2 of the groups. Underlined text are ways that the Campaign can collaborate with specific community organizations as to increase enrollment in 3SQVT.

Solutions

Simplify Application	Length	• Make application 1 pg with larger font
	Application Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home visits to help with application • Provide Registration help at grocery stores • Train family members to complete application • Provide transportation to application centers • Translate application • <u>Host enrollment days</u> • <u>Application Help Line</u>
Educate	Increase Access	• Include application with yearly tax forms
	Educate the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate Medical Centers about Hunger • Word of mouth→Spread the word • Train caregiver network about program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Educational workshops for care givers</u> • Teach organizations about program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Provide online access to 3SQVT eligibility information</u> ▪ <u>Hold staff meetings at health centers</u> ▪ <u>Work with VT Medical Society to increase awareness</u>
Advertise	Recruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior advocates/champions • Politicians
	Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train caregivers • Train children of seniors
	Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State-wide campaigning (how can enrollment help VT) • Social networks to reach out to children of seniors • Provide personal stories • Target radio stations • Rebrand the program
	Public Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flyers at post office, grocery store • Shopping bag stuffers • Change name of campaign (childhood hunger to seniors)

Discussion

Most representatives from participating community organizations knew that the Food Stamp program in VT was rebranded as 3SquaresVT. However, most participants were unaware of specific eligibility requirements to obtain benefits. Surprisingly, despite the fact that most group participants work closely with seniors, they did not accurately estimate 1) The number of seniors who are food insecure in VT, 2) The number of seniors who qualify for 3SQVT benefits, and 3) The number of eligible seniors enrolled (Fig1).

We asked participants what they thought the barriers were for seniors not enrolling in 3SQVT. Each group constructed a list of barriers that they ranked starting with what they thought most adversely affected senior enrollment. When compiling the lists, we found that generational pride was the highest ranked barrier, which is consistent with previously published literature.

Finally, each group brainstormed ways to increase enrollment. Our findings are summarized in Figure 2. According to results, leaders within the senior care community would benefit from additional education concerning 3QVT. This could lead to increased senior enrollment and decrease senior food insecurity in Vermont.

Conclusion

There was a general lack of awareness about the extent of elderly food insecurity and participation in 3SQVT. Most participants underestimated or overestimated both issues. The top five barriers to low participation in 3SQVT were generational pride, application difficulty, lack of awareness, insufficient advertising, and the assumption that they are ineligible. Solutions to increasing participation in 3SQVT consisted of: simplifying the application process, educating the community, and increasing exposure to the program.

Reference

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