

Whitepaper: Bridging the Gap in Housing Stability Through Nutrition Education

Executive Summary

Low-income housing developers face increasing pressure to provide not just shelter, but holistic support systems that promote resident well-being and long-term stability. In Monroe County, where poverty and food insecurity are rising, nutrition education is a critically often overlooked component of housing success. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Monroe County (CCE Monroe) offers evidence-based, community-embedded nutrition and wellness programs that directly address these challenges. This whitepaper outlines the urgent need, proven impact, and partnership opportunities for housing developers to integrate CCE Monroe's services into their residential communities.

The Challenge: Poverty, Food Insecurity, and Health Disparities

- 13% of Monroe County residents live in poverty; in Rochester, that number jumps to 27.9%, with 42% of children affected.
- Food insecurity rose from 9.6% in 2021 to 13% in 2023, disproportionately impacting Black (28%) and Latino (31%) households.
- Residents in ZIP codes like 14605, 14614, and 14611 face food desert conditions, limiting access to affordable, nutritious food.
- Chronic health conditions such as obesity (32%) and diabetes are prevalent, exacerbated by poor diet and limited health education.

The Opportunity: Nutrition Education as a Stabilizing Force

CCE Monroe's programs are designed to meet residents where they are—physically, culturally, and economically. For housing developers, this means:

- **On-Site Nutrition Workshops** - Topics include healthy cooking on a budget, food safety, shopping tips, and chronic disease prevention. Residents report cooking more at home, saving money, and improving health outcomes.
- **Youth Outreach Programming** - STEM-based afterschool activities, gardening clubs, cooking classes, mindfulness, and leadership development. Keeps youth engaged, builds confidence, and supports intergenerational learning.
- **Family Engagement Events** - Garden build days, healthy family meals, and parenting education. Strengthens family bonds and builds community resilience.
- **Food Security Support** - Connection to emergency food resources and guidance on maximizing SNAP benefits. Helps families stretch limited budgets and reduce reliance on emergency aid.

Why It Matters for Housing Developers

- **Resident Retention & Stability**
 - Healthier, more engaged residents are more likely to remain in housing long-term.
 - Nutrition education reduces stress, improves family dynamics, and fosters community.
- **Compliance & Funding Alignment**
 - Programs align with HUD's Resident Services and Enrichment goals.
 - CCE Monroe can be a named partner on grant applications and provide impact metrics for reporting.
- **Community Building**
 - Weekly sessions and events foster relationships among residents, creating a support system that enhances safety and satisfaction.

Urgency: Threats to SNAP-Ed and Local Capacity

Federal funding cuts to SNAP-Ed in 2026 threaten to eliminate free, accessible nutrition education in Monroe County. Without intervention:

- Thousands of residents will lose tools for health and stability.
- Emergency food systems and healthcare providers will face increased strain.
- Housing communities may see rising instability due to poor health and financial stress.

Call to Action: Partner with CCE Monroe

CCE Monroe is ready to collaborate with housing developers to:

- Embed nutrition education into residential programming.
- Co-design wellness initiatives tailored to your community's needs.
- Provide measurable outcomes that demonstrate impact and support funding.

Contact

To explore partnership opportunities, visit monroe.cce.cornell.edu/nutrition or reach out to Andrea Lista, Executive Director @ 585-753-2559 or aml355@cornell.edu.

Conclusion

Nutrition education is not a luxury—it's a necessity for housing stability. By partnering with CCE Monroe, developers can transform housing into a foundation for health, empowerment, and community resilience.