Everyone is at their best when they have enough to eat, but nearly 1 in 7 Coloradans struggle to put food on the table, whether due to a job loss, health issue, minimum-wage job or misfortune.

On a tight budget, people may have to choose between paying rent and heat instead of buying food. They may have to turn to already-strained charitable and faith-based groups distributing emergency food, just to make ends meet. Fortunately, resources like food stamps, federally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, exist to ensure families and individuals can purchase groceries.

No one should have to worry about when or where they will get their next meal, and food stamps serve as a lifeline for families who are living paycheck to paycheck. For some, food stamps may be all that they have to buy groceries due to their wages needing to cover other basics like rent, electricity, transportation, child care and medications. For others, it may allow them to purchase more nutritious foods or food recommended by their doctor to mitigate diseases such as diabetes that, otherwise, they could not purchase.

Food stamps invest in hard-working families, children and seniors and help create a brighter, better future for all Coloradans.
FOOD STAMP FACTS

FOOD STAMPS HELP THOSE IN NEED, WHETHER DUE TO A JOB LOSS, HEALTH ISSUE, MINIMUM-WAGE JOB OR MISFORTUNE.

According to the most recent Program Access Index, only 3 in 5 eligible households (58%) actually utilize the nutrition support, meaning too many Coloradans who are striving for a better, brighter future continue to lack the fuel needed for stronger bodies and minds.

FOOD STAMPS CREATE OPPORTUNITY.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, about 255,000 Coloradans, including 130,000 children, were lifted out of poverty due to food stamps between 2009 and 2013. The program serves as an economic bridge, helping people get back on their feet. Most Colorado families and individuals, on average, only use food stamps for 11 months, according to the USDA. And, a majority of able-bodied recipients in Colorado do work, and those unable to work—more than 300,000 children, seniors and individuals who are disabled—are the ones benefiting most from the program.

THOSE SEEKING ASSISTANCE MUST UNDERGO A RIGOROUS APPLICATION PROCESS AND ABIDE BY BENEFIT USE.

Colorado families and individuals must complete a detailed application process, which requires verification and determines their qualification for benefits and monthly allotment based on household size, wages, assets and other factors. For example, you must be a U.S. citizen and your household’s gross income cannot exceed 130% of the federal poverty guideline, which is $31,536 per year for a family of four. After completing the application, they must interview with their county Department of Human Services to determine if they qualify and are approved.

Participating households receive their food stamp benefits on a monthly basis, which are automatically loaded onto a Quest Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card, which looks like a credit card. For food assistance, EBT cards can be used at authorized food retailers, such as grocers, convenience stores and a growing number of farmers markets, for non-prepared food purchases only. The spent funds are deducted after purchase, and recipients cannot exceed their monthly allotment since the funds are preloaded.

Food stamp recipients cannot purchase toiletries, diapers, alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana or other non-food items with their food assistance benefits, nor can they be used at an ATM for cash withdrawal.

FOOD STAMPS SUPPORT RETAILERS AND OUR STATE’S ECONOMY.

In Colorado, food stamps helped create 71,985 jobs between 2008 and 2012, and it generated an estimated $3.1 billion in federal funding for Colorado retailers, including grocery stores and farmers markets, in the past five years. Further, every $1 increase in food stamp benefits generates about $1.70 in economic activity, boosting our state’s economic health. Simply put, food stamps makes dollars and sense for Colorado.

THE PROGRAM IS EFFICIENT, WITH A LOW FRAUD AND ABUSE RATE, AND ONLY MAKES UP A TINY PORTION OF THE FEDERAL BUDGET.

Food stamps only account for about 2% of the federal budget, meaning cuts or drastic changes to the program would not provide noticeable savings for taxpayers, and instead, hurt working families, children and seniors. About 92 cents of every federal dollar for food stamps goes into benefits, which far exceeds other government programs. It has a strong record of program integrity, with historically low error and trafficking rates. The fraud/abuse rate for food stamps, nationally, is about 1%.

Hunger Free Colorado, a statewide nonprofit organization launched in 2009, connects families to food resources and fuels change in systems, policies and social views, so no Coloradan goes hungry.

HungerFreeColorado.org /HungerFreeColorado @HungerFreeCO

All data points are sourced and cited, along with other facts, on HungerFreeColorado.org.