

# Supporting Wellness at Pantries Improves Access to Healthy Foods in New Haven



2023

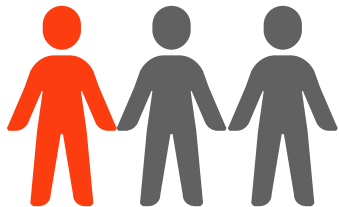
## AT A GLANCE

The Community Alliance for Research and Engagement (CARE) has partnered with food pantries in New Haven to implement Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP), an evidence-based nutrition program that aims to increase access to and distribution of healthier foods. CARE has partnered with 10 pantries to implement SWAP, with a total reach of more than 25,000 people per year. SWAP has effectively increased the availability of nutritious foods, particularly in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, where the most significant health inequities are experienced.

## PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

In New Haven, CT, CARE focuses its REACH activities in six low-income neighborhoods, which consist of approximately 80% Black or Hispanic/Latino residents compared to 61% citywide. Residents in these neighborhoods experience the highest poverty rates and levels of food insecurity in the city.<sup>1,2</sup> These communities face drastically higher rates of chronic diseases, compared to national and state averages. Addressing health inequities requires improving residents' access to healthy foods.

### In New Haven's low-income neighborhoods



**1** in **3** Residents live below the poverty level



**3** in **10** Adults experience food insecurity

## APPROACH

Since 2019, CARE and partnering pantries have been implementing SWAP, which uses a stoplight system to help promote healthier food choices at food banks and food pantries.<sup>3</sup> SWAP ranks foods based on levels of saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar—nutrients linked with increased chronic disease risk.<sup>4</sup>

CARE provides training to pantry staff and volunteers on using the SWAP guidelines to rank food as **Green**, **Yellow**, or **Red** based on nutritional values. Pantries receive promotional materials and are trained on promoting SWAP among pantry guests by labeling food items with color-coded tags and displaying **Green** items prominently. CARE also conducts regular site visits with participating SWAP pantries to provide support with implementation as needed.



### GREEN

Choose often; low in saturated fat, sodium and sugar, supports health

### YELLOW

Choose sometimes; medium levels of fat, sodium or sugar; can contribute to good health

### RED

Choose rarely; high levels of fat, sodium or sugar; think of as treats; limited health benefits



Part of our goal is to provide healthier options. So I feel like coming on board with SWAP helped us to really make that happen... SWAP has helped us realize [what] our dream is, which is to provide healthier options to our clients and educating them at the same time.

**THE NEW HAVEN INNER CITY ENRICHMENT (NICE) CENTER**

## RESULTS

Feedback was collected from pantry staff and volunteers through surveys, interviews, and a listening session focused on program facilitators, barriers, areas for improvement, and sustainability strategies. Pantry staff and volunteers have reported that SWAP gives them an “additional boost” to help further their mission of offering healthy foods to pantry guests by amplifying their awareness of and commitment to distributing nutritious foods. They have also acknowledged that SWAP’s simple guidelines are a practical and beneficial tool to guide pantry operations, particularly in terms of tracking food inventory and informing food procurement. SWAP streamlines the process of identifying healthy foods and provides education on healthier food options to pantry guests.

Ultimately, the SWAP program led to shifts at participating pantries, marked by an increase in the availability of healthier foods and a decrease in unhealthy options in some pantries. For example, one pantry’s inventory experienced an increase in the amount of food ranked **Green** by approximately 6%. Similarly, another pantry’s inventory saw an increase of 5% in items ranked **Green**, as well as a decrease in **Red** items of 3% following SWAP implementation.

## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

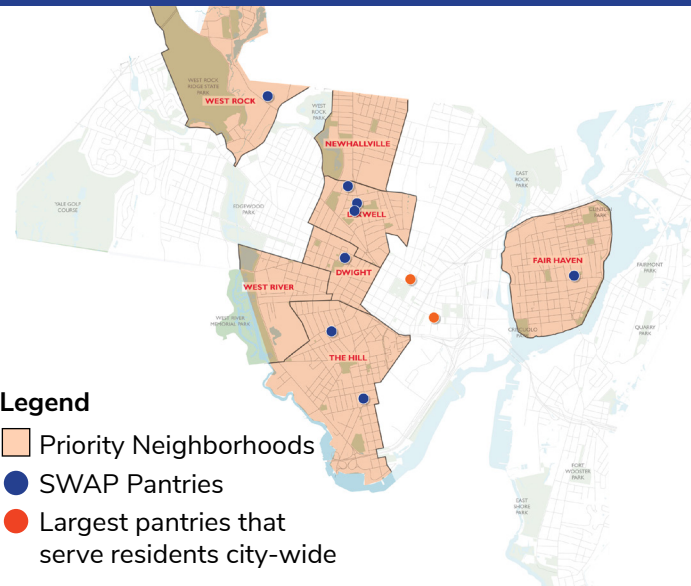
To further enhance the impact of the SWAP program, the primary focus of future efforts will be addressing the challenges of limited availability of healthy food items from regional food banks, such as Connecticut Foodshare (CTFS). In order to do so, a concerted, collaborative effort is underway to enhance the procurement of healthier foods from food banks, enabling pantries across New Haven to continue making a positive difference in the lives of their guests.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

SWAP is a program of the Institute for Hunger Research & Solutions at Connecticut Foodshare. For more information about SWAP, visit [ctfoodshare.org](http://ctfoodshare.org) or contact [swap@foodshare.org](mailto:swap@foodshare.org).

The Community Alliance for Research and Engagement (CARE) is implementing SWAP across pantries in New Haven, CT. For more information, please visit [carenhv.org](http://carenhv.org) or contact Sofia I. Morales at [sofia.morales@yale.edu](mailto:sofia.morales@yale.edu).

References can be found by visiting: [bit.ly/storyofSWAP](https://bit.ly/storyofSWAP)



### Legend

- Priority Neighborhoods
- SWAP Pantries
- Largest pantries that serve residents city-wide

### BY THE NUMBERS

**10** PANTRIES PARTNER WITH CARE FOR SWAP

**25,625** PEOPLE SERVED ACROSS PANTRIES PER YEAR

**715,000+** TOTAL LBS OF FOOD DISTRIBUTED



People want to feel like they’re part of a plan...a methodical plan. And SWAP is a very methodical plan that makes sense. It’s very easy to understand, I can pitch it in 20 seconds to people.

LOAVES & FISHES

## FUNDING

This project is funded by the CDC’s Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program.



Scan the QR code to visit [www.CAREnhv.org](http://www.CAREnhv.org)

