Data Foundation Unveils Community-First Learning Agenda on Nutrition, Hunger & Health

The learning agenda offers a model for cross-sector, bottom-up evidence-building.

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, September 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- For 50 years, federal initiatives and national commissions have set out to end hunger and improve nutrition in America. Each one generated ample data, evaluations, and research findings, and yet the problems have remained entrenched. Today, the Data Foundation released the Learning Agenda on Nutrition, Hunger & Health, a new community-first roadmap developed in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to chart the field's path forward.

The share of American households that are food insecure has changed little since the U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Department of Agriculture first fielded the Current Population Survey's Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS), the nation's most authoritative measure of food security, in 1995. It was 11.9 percent of households in 1995 and 13.7 percent in 2024, the 30th and final year of the food security supplemental survey.

“Thirty years of consistent and precise measurement have documented the extent of the problem and some promising solutions, but billions of dollars in public and private investment to reduce food insecurity and improve diet-related health have not moved the needle enough,” said Sara Stefanik, Director of the Data Foundation's Center for Evidence Capacity. “We need better coordination, standards, capacity, and infrastructure to translate and scale evidence of effective interventions into information decision-makers across sectors and communities can actually use to address hunger and poor nutrition.”

The agenda is the product of six focus groups and a cross-sector workshop that brought together 16 experts and then 33 participants — frontline researchers, community organizations, academics, and federal partners — to identify the field's priority research questions and the data infrastructure needed to answer them. Rather than following the traditional, siloed approach of following a single agency's strategic plan, this learning agenda takes a “topical” approach that cuts across organizational lines to address an entire domain of research and practice.

“The first draft of the Foundations for Evidence Based Policymaking Act when it was filed in Congress encouraged cross-topic learning in agencies. While the final law narrowed the requirements to agency-only plans, there is still hope that breaking down agency and community

silos can be achieved through intentional effort and collaboration," said Nick Hart, Ph.D., President and CEO of the Data Foundation. "With support from the RWJF and an enthusiastic community of nutrition experts over the past year, the Data Foundation's Center for Evidence Capacity co-created a sectoral learning agenda that serves as a model for engagement, community-led agendas, and participatory process. We hope this can be a way to expand and accelerate the impact of the Evidence Act in the years ahead."

The agenda organizes its research questions into four interrelated topic areas — data and evidence infrastructure, nutrition assistance programs, social determinants of health, and food and nutrition in medicine — and pairs them with guidelines for effective and ethical data practices covering collection, management, privacy, and open science. Together, the questions and guidelines are designed to be complementary, equipping the field to build the evidence base its own priorities call for.

The Data Foundation is marking the release with a webinar today, Sept. 3, at 1 p.m. ET, where Hart and Stefanik will be joined by the following speakers:
- Susan Jenkins, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, Center for Evidence Capacity, Data Foundation
- Spiro Stefanou, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Economics at Penn State and former Administrator of the USDA's Economic Research Service
- Nathan Varnell, Policy and Research Analyst, Center for Evidence Capacity, Data Foundation
- Shelly Ver Ploeg, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy

The webinar will explore why the agenda matters now, how it bridges research across government, academia, and community organizations, how field experts shaped its research questions, and what agencies, funders, and researchers can do next to close the evidence and data infrastructure gaps it identifies.

>>>DOWNLOAD THE LEARNING AGENDA

About the Center for Evidence Capacity
The Data Foundation's Center for Evidence Capacity focuses on the resources, people, processes, and funding needed to ensure that data and evidence are effectively used during policy implementation and decision-making. The Center supports major activities such as federal learning agenda implementation, multi-year evidence-building strategies, open data and engagement plans, and resources for data and artificial intelligence literacy, evaluation policy and practice, and evidence transparency.

J.B. Wogan
Data Foundation
+1 202-964-1130
email us here
Visit us on social media:
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