



# Levers for Expanding Access to SNAP for College Students in Colorado

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# We thank our many important contributors to the project



## TEAM AND PARTNERS

Jennifer Kret (CDHS), Brian Phillips (RAND), Jonathan Cantor (RAND), and Amanda Perez (RAND) are other key team members contributing to the analysis.

Our collaborators at CDHE and CDHS are essential partners in the work. We have a fantastic advisory board of Colorado partners who provide ongoing input on the study and findings. Members come from state agencies, postsecondary institutions, county human services offices, and non-profit organizations.



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## DATA PROVIDERS

This work would not be possible without anonymized data provided by the Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC). The findings do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Colorado Governor's Office of Information Technology, the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, or the organizations contributing data.



# Many college students face food insecurity but don't access public benefits

**23%**

experiencing food insecurity

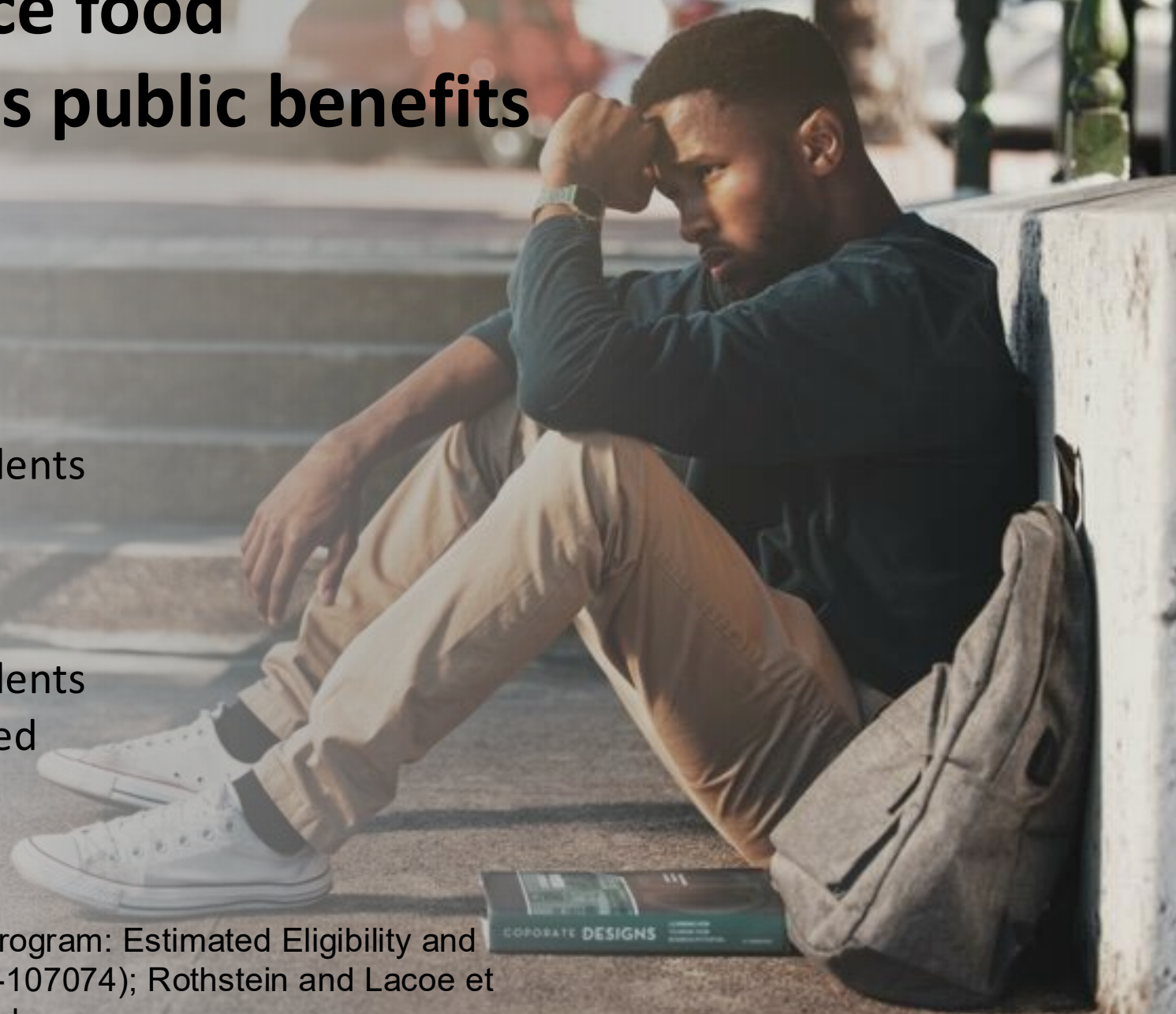
**2M+**

potentially SNAP-eligible students not participating nationally

**~75%+**

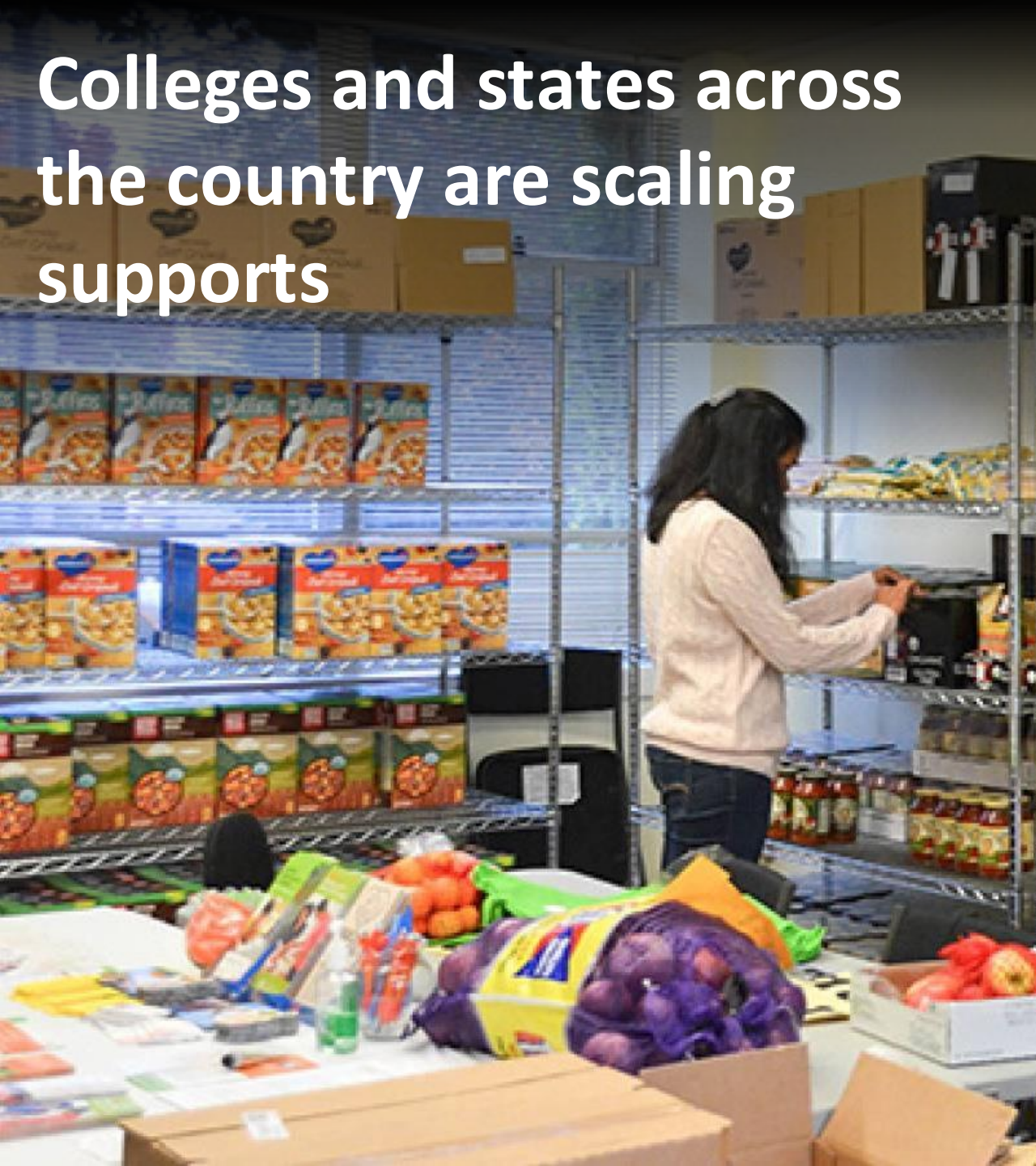
potentially SNAP-eligible students not participating in state-based studies (CA, VA)

Sources: NPSAS:20; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Estimated Eligibility and Receipt among Food Insecure College Students (GAO-24-107074); Rothstein and Lacoë et al., 2024; State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, n.d.





# Colleges and states across the country are scaling supports



## College approaches

- Food pantries
- SNAP and Medicaid application support
- Basic needs centers, navigators
- Emergency aid
- Referrals to community partners

## State supports

- Funding
- Standards and guidance
- Professional development and communities of practice
- Technology (e.g., Single Stop)
- Efforts to simplify and expand eligibility for financial aid, SNAP

## Federal supports

- COVID-19 funding to colleges and students
- Expanded SNAP eligibility

# CDHE, CDHS and RAND partnered to build evidence on college students and SNAP in several areas



SNAP participation, application, and denial rates among Colorado's public college enrollees; college SNAP practices in Colorado



How college student SNAP participation might shift under four levers: (1) permanent expansions to federal eligibility; (2) state changes to modify interpretations of SNAP-eligible programs; (3) expanded state and college SNAP outreach and application support; (4) expanded outreach to Work Study students.



Relationships between student SNAP participation and academic outcomes

# Today we'll share some findings on Colorado college student SNAP participation and levers for expanding participation



SNAP participation, application, and denial rates among Colorado's public college enrollees; college SNAP practices in Colorado



How college student SNAP participation might shift under four levers: (1) permanent expansions to federal eligibility; (2) state changes to modify interpretations of SNAP-eligible programs; (3) expanded state and college SNAP outreach and application support; (4) expanded outreach to Work Study students.



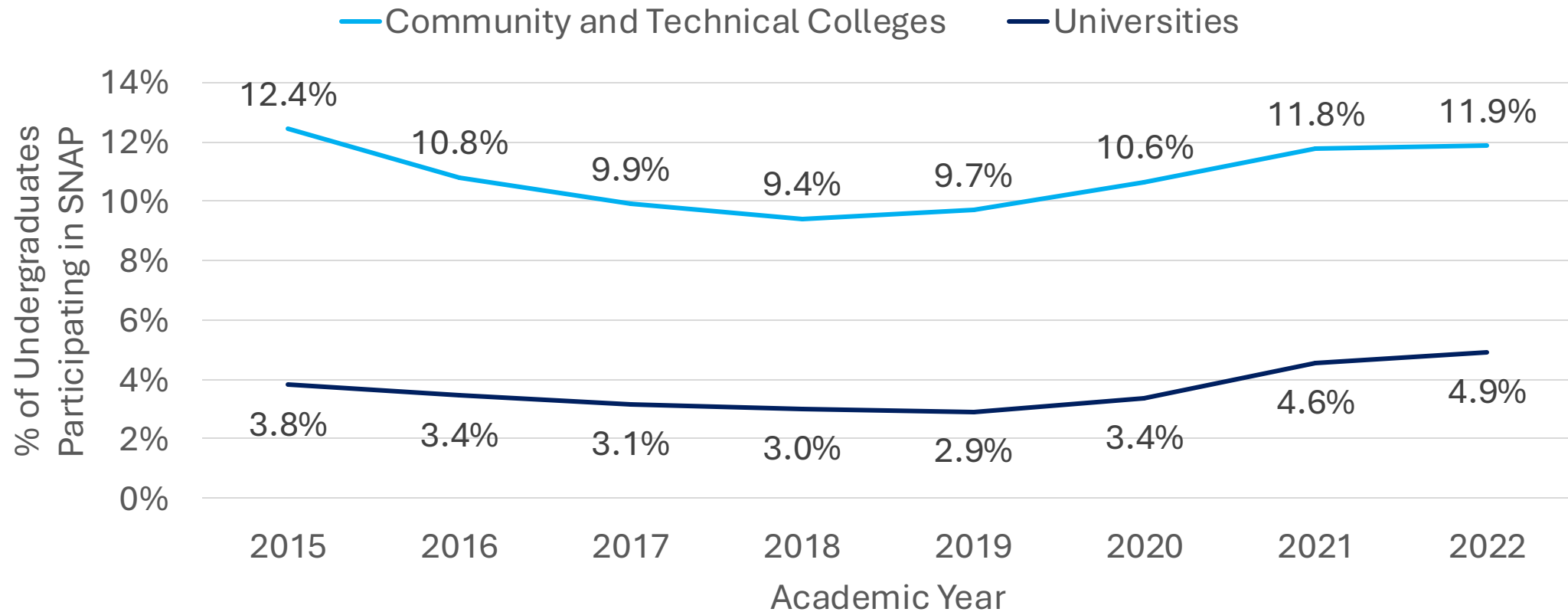
Relationships between student SNAP participation and academic outcomes





What do we know  
about Colorado's  
current college student  
SNAP participation?

# SNAP participation is higher among community college enrollees than university enrollees

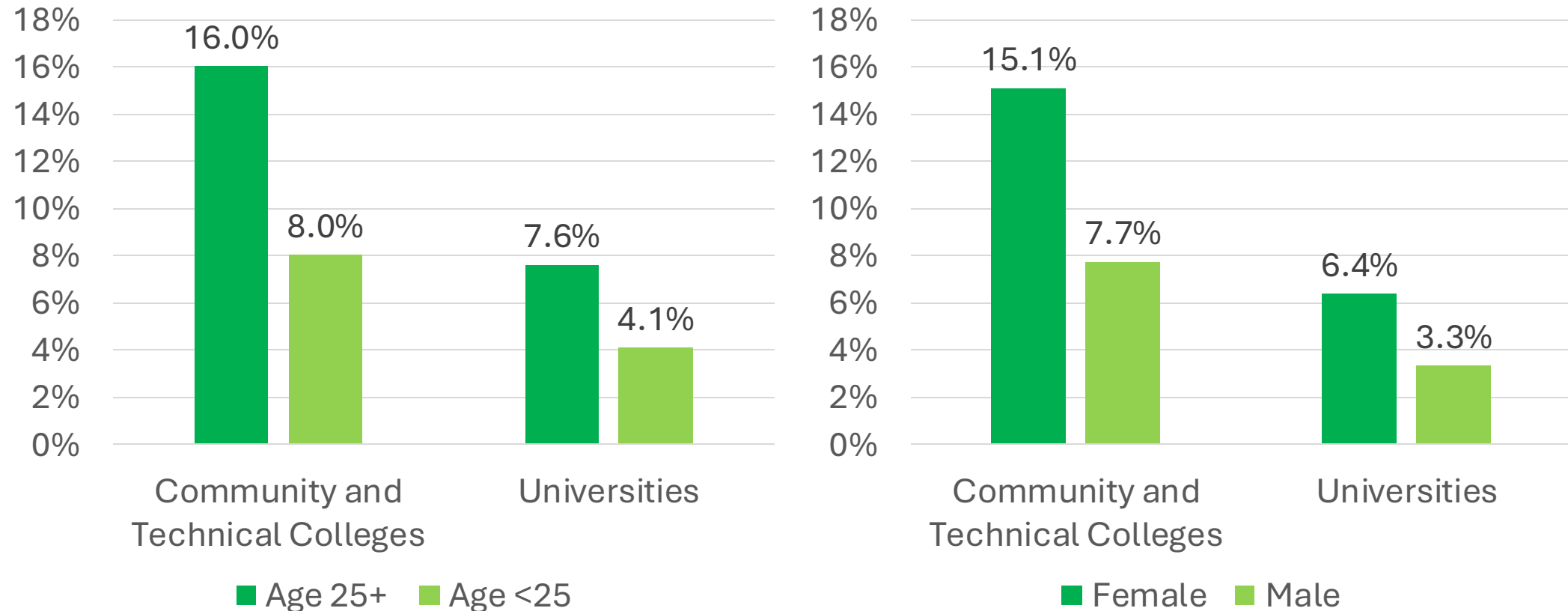


Source: Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC), Colorado Department of Education (CDHE), Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS).  
Notes: Academic years in this analysis span September of the prior calendar year through August; for example, academic year 2022 spans September 2021 through August 2022. Individuals are identified as SNAP participants if they received a SNAP benefit during any month in that year. We group technical schools with community colleges for the purposes of this analysis.



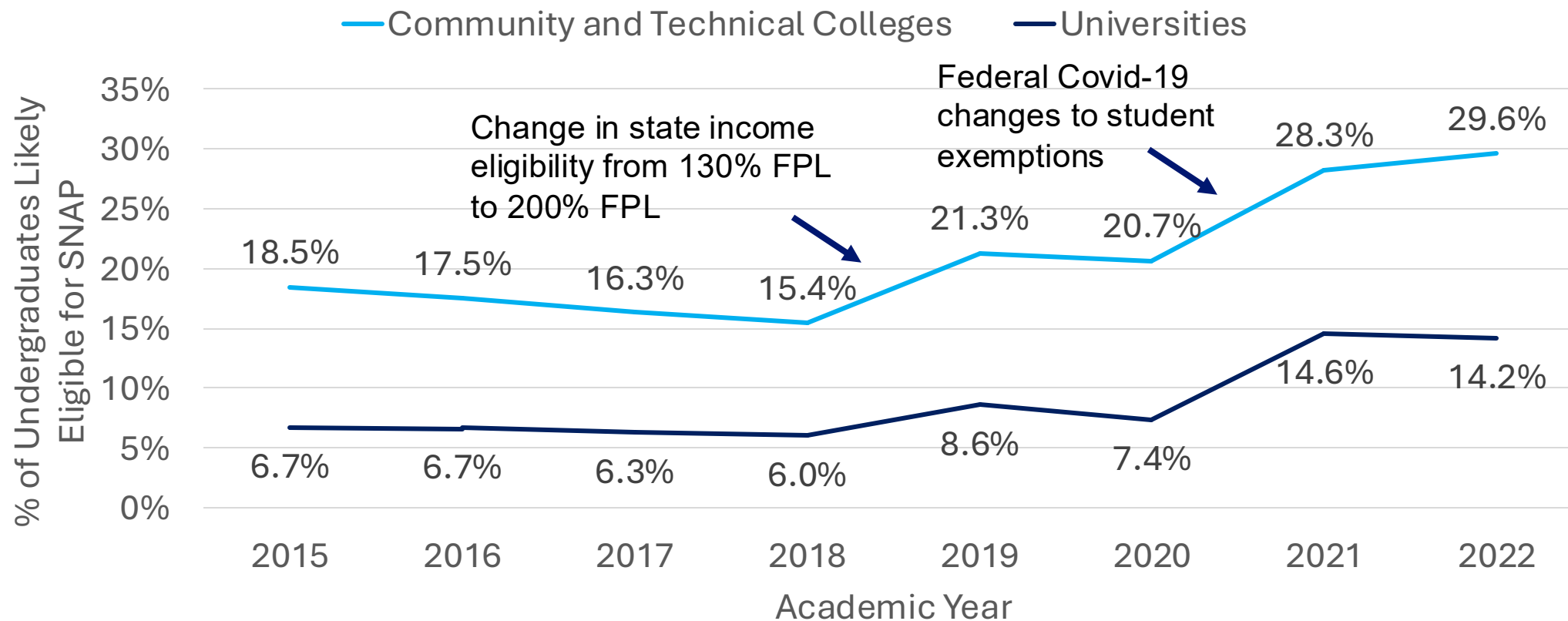
# Adult learners and females had higher rates of SNAP participation

% of Undergraduates in Each Group Participating in SNAP, 2022



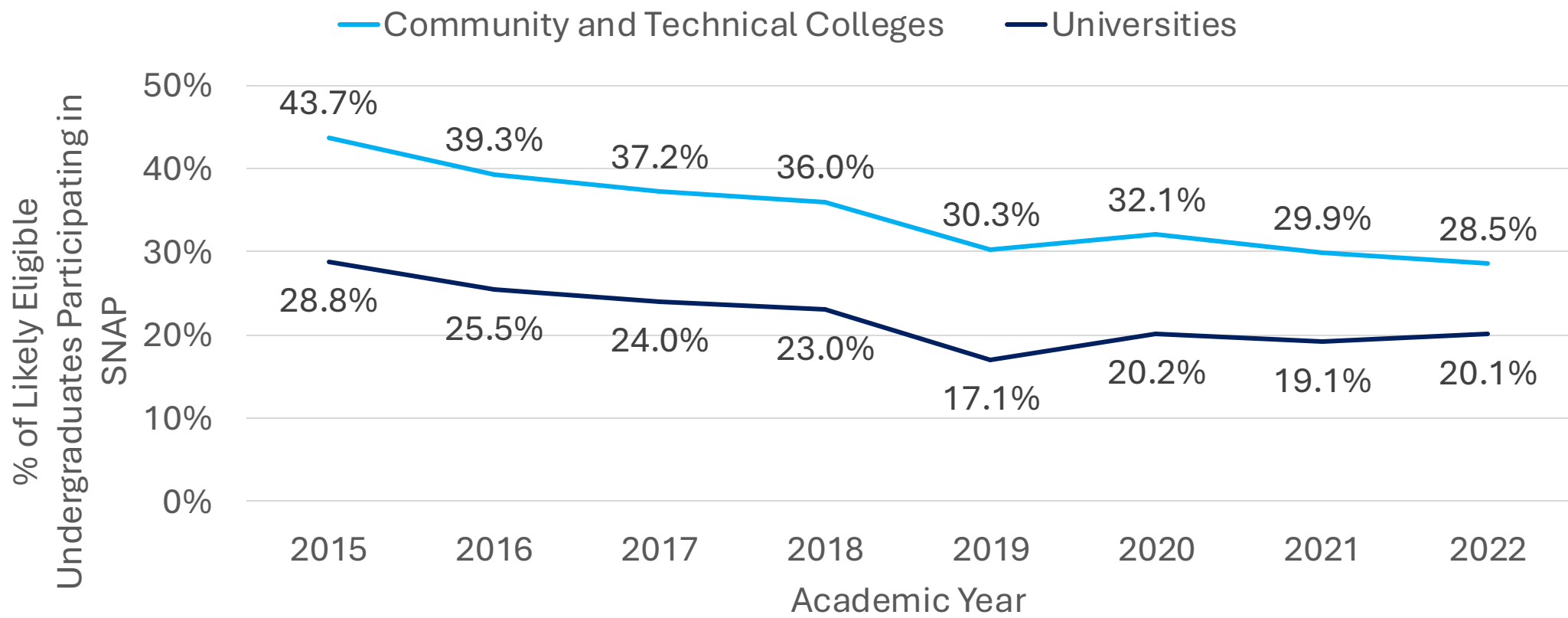
Source: Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC), Colorado Department of Education (CDHE), Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS).  
Notes: About 48% of community and technical college students are age 25+ compared to about 23% of university students. About 56% of community and technical college students are female compared to about 52% of university students. Academic years in this analysis span September of the prior calendar year through August; for example, academic year 2022 spans September 2021 through August 2022. Individuals are identified as SNAP participants if they received a SNAP benefit during any month in that year. We group technical schools with community colleges for the purposes of this analysis.

# More college students have become eligible for SNAP in recent years due to state and federal policy changes



Source: Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC), Colorado Department of Education (CDHE), Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS).  
Notes: Academic years in this analysis span September of the prior calendar year through August; for example, academic year 2022 spans September 2021 through August 2022. Individuals are identified as likely eligible if they met observable criteria to receive SNAP benefits during that year. We group technical schools with community colleges for the purposes of this analysis.

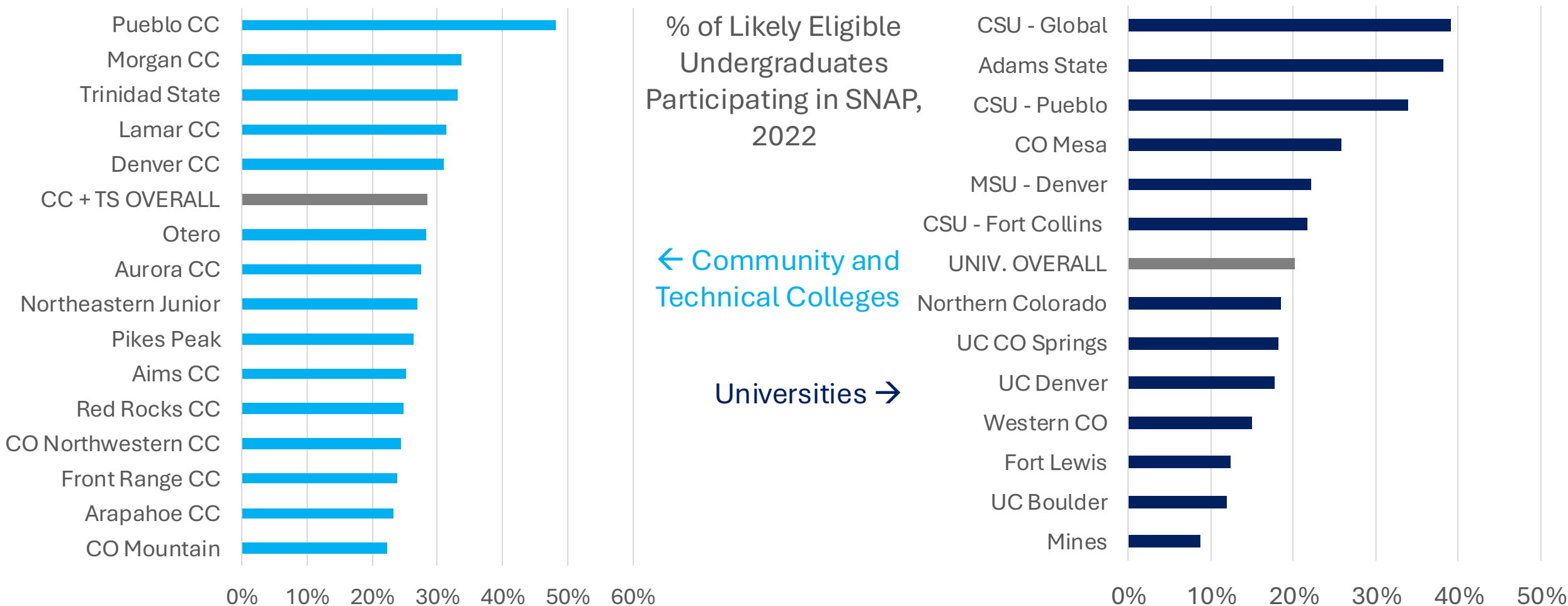
# Participation rates among eligible students have declined over time as additional students became eligible



Source: Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC), Colorado Department of Education (CDHE), Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS).  
Notes: Academic years in this analysis span September of the prior calendar year through August; for example, academic year 2022 spans September 2021 through August 2022. Individuals are identified as likely eligible if they met observable criteria to receive SNAP benefits during that year. Individuals are identified as SNAP participants if they received a SNAP benefit during any month in that year. We group technical schools with community colleges for the purposes of this analysis.

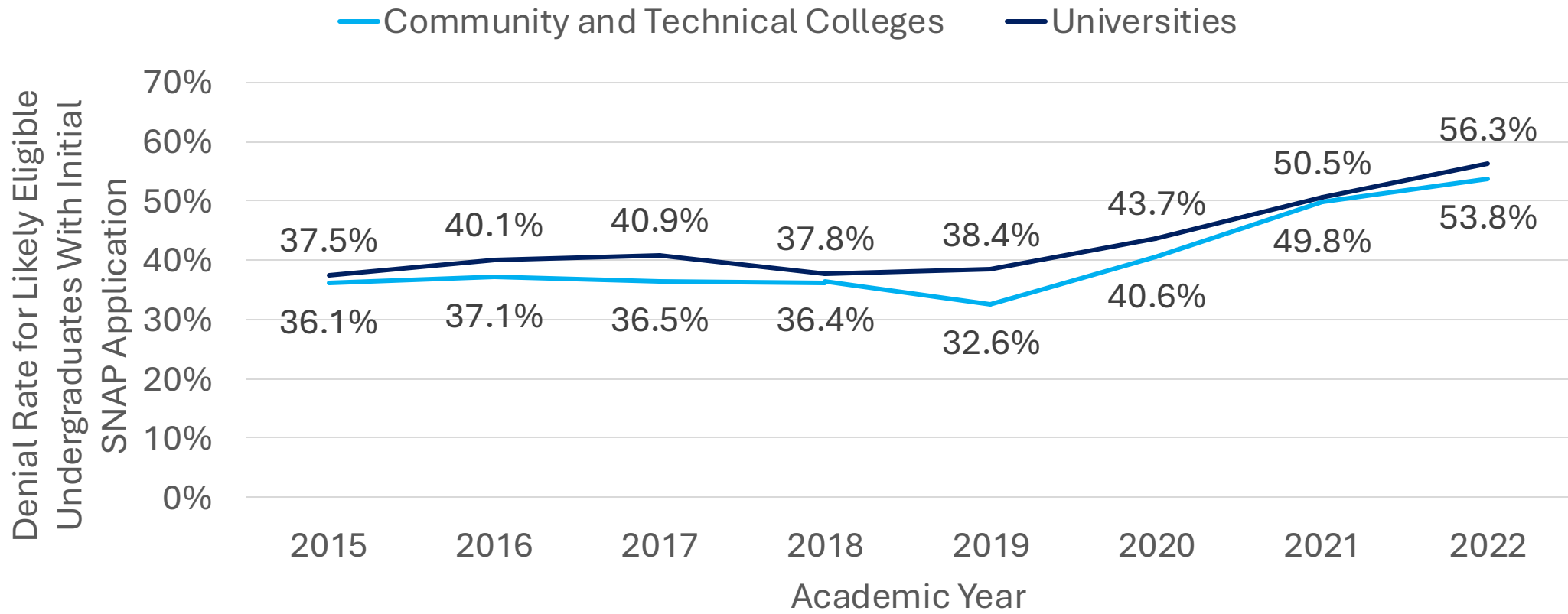


# There is considerable institution-level variation in SNAP participation rates among likely SNAP-eligible students



Source: Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC), Colorado Department of Education (CDHE), Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS).  
Notes: Academic years in this analysis span September of the prior calendar year through August; for example, academic year 2022 spans September 2021 through August 2022. Individuals are identified as SNAP participants if they received a SNAP benefit during any month in that year. Individuals are identified as likely eligible if they met observable criteria to receive SNAP benefits during that year. Data for individual technical schools not shown due to small sample sizes.

# Many likely eligible student SNAP applicants were denied, and denials increased during the pandemic



Source: Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC), Colorado Department of Education (CDHE), Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS).  
Notes: Academic years in this analysis span September of the prior calendar year through August; for example, academic year 2022 spans September 2021 through August 2022. Percentages displayed reflect the share of likely SNAP-eligible undergraduates enrolled in any CDHE institution with an initial application during any month in that year who had an initial application denied in any month of the year.

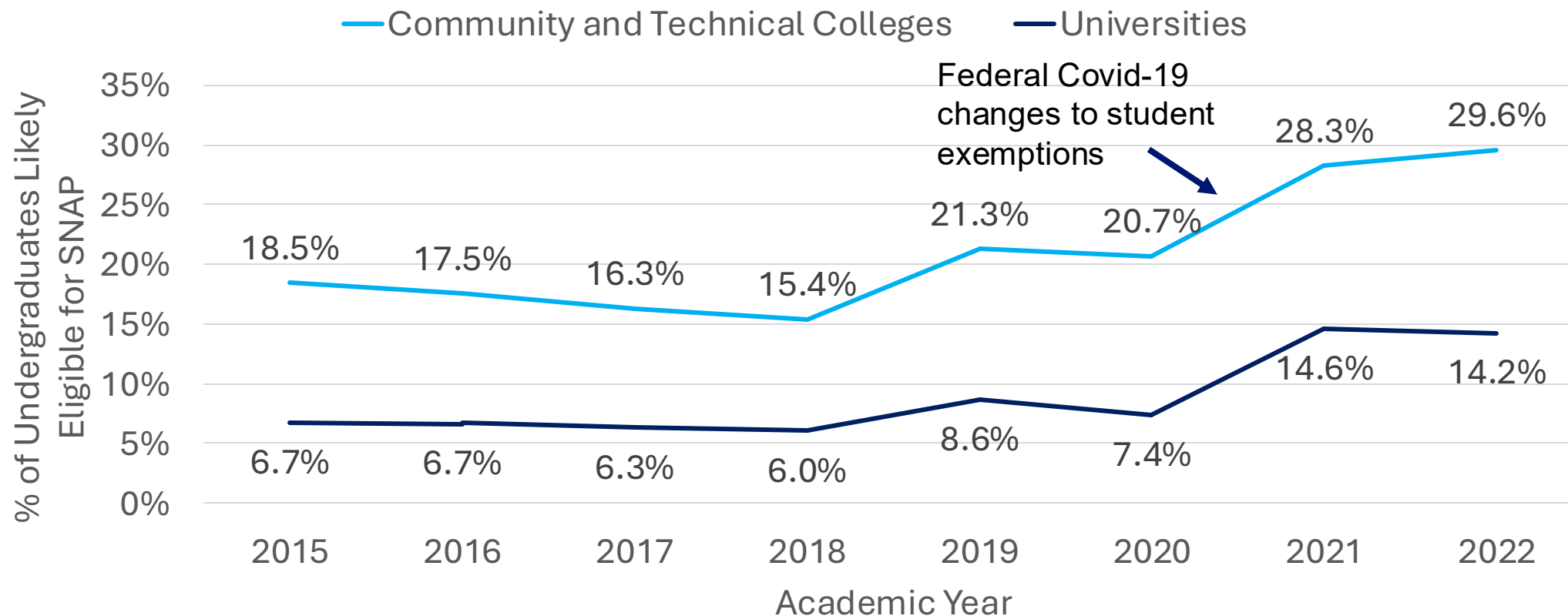


## How might college student SNAP participation change under four levers?

- 1) Federal changes to eligibility criteria
- 2) State determinations around SNAP-eligible programs
- 3) Expanded outreach and application support to all likely eligible students
- 4) Focused Work Study student outreach and application support



# We noted that federal changes to student SNAP rules during COVID-19 expanded eligibility



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Notes: Academic years in this analysis span September of the prior calendar year through August; for example, academic year 2022 spans September 2021 through August 2022. Individuals are identified as likely eligible if they met observable criteria to receive SNAP benefits during that year. We group technical schools with community colleges for the purposes of this analysis.

# We use Colorado data to estimate how permanent federal expansions might shift SNAP participation

- Eligibility: We assume an ~50% increase in the eligible student population
  - We use Colorado data on all individuals who have an Expected Family Contribution of 0 and meet SNAP income limits for this estimate.
- Participation: We consider two possible rates of participation among eligible students
  - *Lower rates of participation than other eligible students:* We observed somewhat lower participation among EFC=0 students during COVID-19, so use this as a lower bound.
  - *Similar participation rates:* We assume lower COVID-era participation could be due to lack of awareness and could increase over time to the same rate as the overall eligible population.

# Expanding eligibility to income-eligible students with an EFC of zero meaningfully increases the SNAP-eligible pool

Lever	Increase in SNAP-eligible students	Modeled SNAP participation rates among eligible	Increase in overall SNAP participants
1) Federal eligibility expansion	16,000 newly eligible	17-28% of newly eligible	2,700-4,500 newly participating
2) State changes in eligibility interpretations			
3) Expanded outreach and application support			
4) Targeted outreach and application support to Work Study students			

NOTE: model estimates based on 2019-20 data; low-end estimate assumes newly eligibles participate at same rate as students who were eligible only because of EFC zero exemption in 2020-21 and 2021-22 by institution type; high-end estimate assumes newly eligibles participate at same rate as all eligible students who required a student exemption in 2019-20 (prior to EFC zero exemption) by institution type





## How might college student SNAP participation change under four levers?

- 1) Federal changes to eligibility criteria
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# States have several options for making changes that simplify and expand college student SNAP eligibility

- States can deem certain education and training programs as eligible SNAP by for satisfying one of the student exemptions (the 3(D) exemption)
  - E.g., Students in WIOA and Perkins-funded training programs can be deemed SNAP-eligible if they meet income requirements
  - Applies only to students enrolled half-time or more
- Another possible state policy lever might be to count education and training time toward federal work requirements
  - This would apply to all students regardless of enrollment intensity

# States have taken varying approaches to expanding SNAP eligibility under these regulatory authorities

State	Institutions Eligible	Programs Eligible	Process
California	Two-year and four-year	Local programs that improve employability” (LPIEs)	Students submit a printout verifying their institution and program
Georgia	Two-year	Career/Technical Education Programs or other Vocational Training (EPC)	Via SNAP E&T program
Kentucky	Two-year	A list of 109 vocational programs	Via SNAP E&T program
New Mexico	Two-year	Career or technical certificate programs	Via SNAP E&T program
Massachusetts	Two-year, tech schools, some CTE-focused four-year universities	Perkins programs	Students can self-attest to being enrolled in an eligible program
Oregon	Two-year and four-year	All programs	Students can self-attest to being enrolled in a program that will lead to employment
Pennsylvania	Two-year and four-year	Expansive list, includes SNAP & KEYS program services	Students receive a signed form from the institution
Virginia	Two-year	Programs aligned with a list of high-demand credentials	Via SNAP E&T program
Washington	Two-year	All programs	Often reverse refer to SNAP E&T program



# We use Colorado data to estimate how state eligibility changes could impact participation in SNAP

- Eligibility: We look at expansion of SNAP to four different populations
  - Enrollees in WIOA programs
  - Enrollees in WIOA and Perkins programs (all institutions)
  - Enrollees in WIOA and Perkins programs (community college and technical school programs)
  - All community college subbaccalaureate programs
- Participation: We assume that these newly eligible students participate at the same rates as currently eligible students.

# State expansions to eligibility can drive increases in participation even if the rate of participation among eligibles is unchanged

Lever	Increase in SNAP-eligible students	Modeled SNAP participation rates among eligible	Increase in overall SNAP participants
1) Federal eligibility expansion	16,000 newly eligible	17-28% of newly eligible	2,700-4,500 newly participating
2) State changes in eligibility interpretations	3,400-11,500 newly eligible	32-39% of newly eligible	1,100-4,500 newly participating
3) Expanded outreach and application support			
4) Targeted outreach and application support to Work Study students			

NOTE: model estimates based on 2019-20 data; participation rates among newly eligibles assumed to match those of all eligible students who required a student exemption in 2019-20 by institution type



## How might college student SNAP participation change under four levers?

- 1) Federal changes to eligibility criteria
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- 4) Focused Work Study student outreach and application support

# CDHE and CDHS have partnered to provide statewide outreach to students on SNAP eligibility

Are you a college student struggling to afford food?



You might be eligible for up to \$234/month from the SNAP program to help purchase groceries. Students with spouses or children may be eligible for more.\*

Rules around SNAP have temporarily changed as a result of COVID-19. Many students with low income who meet any of the following are SNAP-eligible:

- Students who are eligible for work-study even if they currently don't have a work study job on campus
- Students who have an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of \$0
- Students living off campus
- Students with a meal plan that provides less than half their meals
- Students working an average of 20 hours a week

\*Students need to meet other SNAP rules. Learn more about SNAP and the benefit amounts at <https://cdhs.colorado.gov/snap>

Students can apply for SNAP online through the Colorado PEAK website: <https://colorado.gov/PEAK>



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¿Eres un estudiante universitario que tiene dificultades para pagar la comida?



Podrías reunir las condiciones para recibir hasta \$234/mes del programa SNAP como ayuda para comprar comestibles. Los estudiantes con cónyuges o hijos pueden tener derecho a más\*.

Las normas relativas a SNAP han cambiado temporalmente como consecuencia de la COVID-19. Muchos estudiantes con bajos ingresos que cumplen con alguno de los requisitos siguientes reúnen las condiciones para recibir SNAP:

- Estudiantes que reúnen las condiciones del programa de estudio y trabajo aunque no tengan actualmente un cargo de estudio y trabajo en el campus
- Estudiantes que tienen una contribución familiar prevista (EFC) de \$0
- Estudiantes que viven fuera del campus
- Estudiantes con un plan alimenticio que cubre menos de la mitad de sus comidas
- Estudiantes que trabajan en promedio 20 horas a la semana

\*Los estudiantes deben cumplir con otras normas del SNAP. Infórmese más sobre el SNAP y los montos de los beneficios en <https://cdhs.colorado.gov/snap>

Los estudiantes pueden solicitar SNAP en línea por medio del sitio web de Colorado PEAK: <https://colorado.gov/PEAK>



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# CDHE's *Hunger Free Checklist* recommends colleges offer SNAP outreach and application support

<https://cdhe.colorado.gov/resources/social-determinants-of-student-success>

<https://cdhe.colorado.gov/news-article/department-releases-healthy-minds-and-hunger-free-campus-checklists-in-an-effort-to>

### Focused Initiatives

Implement two programs in each of the focused initiatives

#### ACCESS

These programs offer direct assistance accessing food.

- ☐ Increase the capacity of food pantries
- ☐ Provide a variety of meal plans, including an option that provides 10 or fewer meals weekly to avoid interfering with SNAP eligibility
- ☐ Create or implement meal sharing programs, such as the FeedShare app
- ☐ Plant and maintain campus community gardens
- ☐ Implement healthy and affordable vending machines
- ☐ Innovation in access

#### AWARENESS


These programs educate staff, faculty and students on hunger and the resources available to help.

- ☐ Educate student leaders on campus to create student-centered programs
- ☐ Change language to reduce stigma
- ☐ Provide an interactive food resource map
- ☐ Provide educational opportunities for students and staff
- ☐ Create an informational food security resource website
- ☐ Connect work study and financial aid recipients with SNAP outreach services and other food security support services on campus
- ☐ Participate in the #RealCollege Survey
- ☐ Innovation in awareness

#### INTEGRATION

These programs and services bring together different departments on campus to address a variety of barriers to basic needs that impact student food security.

- ☐ Make food pantries a hub for campus resources
- ☐ Pre-screen for SNAP eligibility and refer likely eligible students to application assistance during registration
- ☐ Partner with organizations that help with benefits screening
- ☐ Create a student organization to address food security
- ☐ Conduct regular staff meetings that focus on food security
- ☐ Innovation in integration

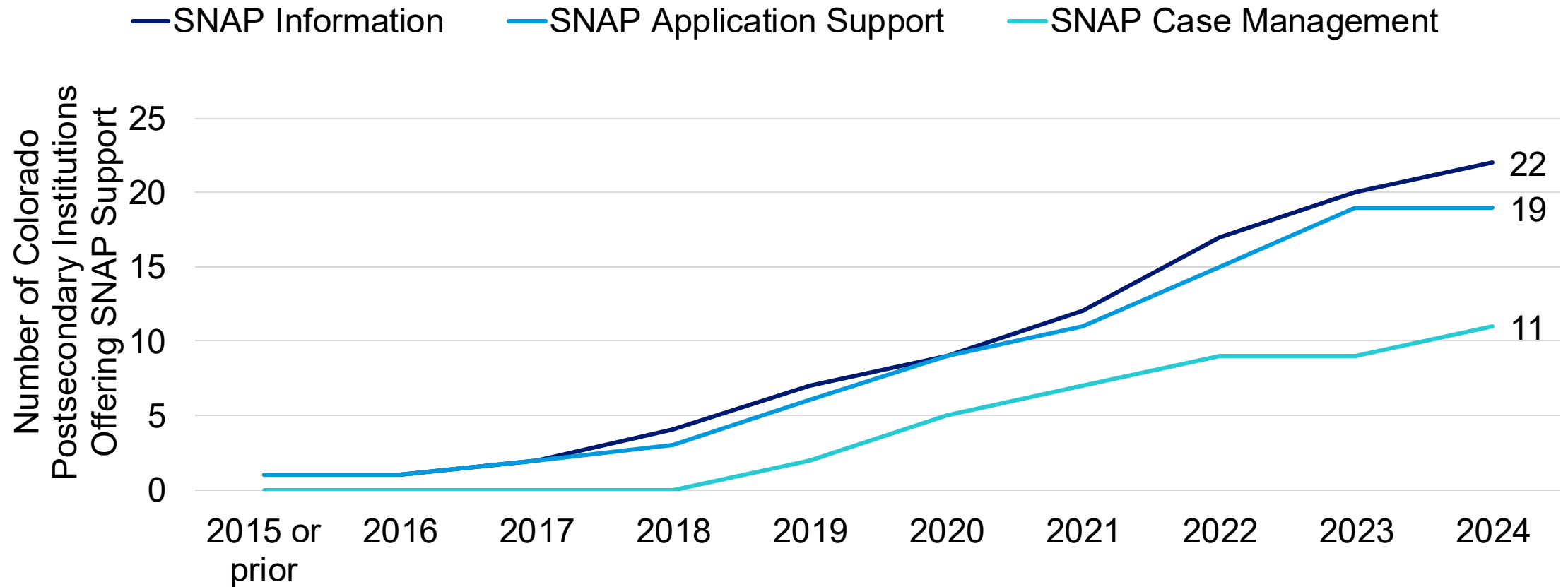


# CDHS's SNAP Outreach program has also helped to build capacity for SNAP support on college campuses

- Increased focus on college students since 2021
  - June 2021: Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) released SNAP Outreach priority areas, including college students
  - CDHS included college students in FFY22 SNAP Outreach State Plan
- Non-profit partners supplement college capacity for SNAP support
  - *SNAP PEAS program*: five university subrecipients, one community college; college staff receiving training, access to PeakPro (SNAP application system), ongoing support
  - *On-campus application support*: potentially available to all Colorado institutions; non-profit staff conduct campus visits to provide assistance via tabling in common spaces



# Colorado public postsecondary institutions have been scaling SNAP supports over the past five years



Source: Survey of all public colleges in Colorado conducted by RAND, March-April 2024.

Notes: Overall, 27 of 31 public institutions responded to the survey, including 2 of the 3 technical schools, 14 of the 15 community colleges, and 11 of the 13 universities. While 24 colleges reported offering services at some point, several did not report years the college had begun to offer services. Those colleges are not displayed on this figure.

# Community colleges were less likely to offer SNAP support, including case management

SNAP Supports and Basic Needs Facilitators	Community Colleges, Technical Schools	Universities	All Public Institutions
Offers information on SNAP eligibility	69%	100%	81%
Offers SNAP application support	63%	81%	81%
Offers SNAP-related case management	25%	64%	41%
Has accessible information on institution website on SNAP eligibility or supports	44%	85%	61%
Number of institutions responding	16 (of 18)	11 (of 13)	27 (of 31)

Source: Survey of all public colleges in Colorado conducted by RAND, March-April 2024.



# We consider state and college-based scenarios for expanding SNAP outreach and application support



## Broad statewide electronic and mail outreach to promote information to students potentially eligible for SNAP

- A randomized study of statewide outreach on the COVID-19 pandemic eligibility changes in California found increases in participation among eligible students of approximately 3 percentage points (Palos Castellanos et al., 2022; Lasky-Fink, Li, and Doherty, 2022).



## Expanded college-level SNAP outreach and case management efforts

- We may be able to use Colorado-specific data and data from an ongoing study in Washington State to estimate impacts in the future
- In the meantime, we use estimates from a study that nudged students to basic needs centers where SNAP application support and case management were available (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2021)
  - Nudges more than doubled students visiting the basic needs center (from 22% to 56%)
  - The study didn't measure SNAP participation rate increases or specifically target SNAP-eligible students
  - We make a plausible **assumption of a 20% increase** in the rate of SNAP participation among eligible students due to increased uptake of case management

# Broader outreach efforts lead to smaller increases in SNAP participation, and do not impact eligibility

Lever	Increase in SNAP-eligible students	Modeled SNAP participation rates among eligible	Increase in overall SNAP participants
1) Federal eligibility expansion	16,000 newly eligible	17-28% of newly eligible	2,700-4,500 newly participating
2) State changes in eligibility interpretations	3,400-11,500 newly eligible	32-39% of newly eligible	1,100-4,500 newly participating
3) Expanded outreach and application support	N/A - unchanged	31-33% of all eligibles	900-1,700 newly participating

NOTE: Model estimates based on 2019-20 data; participation rates for all eligible students assumed to be 2019-20 rates by institution type, plus 3 percentage points (low-end estimate) or plus 20% (high-end estimate)



## How might college student SNAP participation change under four levers?

- 1) Federal changes to eligibility criteria
- 2) State determinations around SNAP-eligible programs
- 3) Expanded outreach and application support to all likely eligible students
- 4) Focused Work Study student outreach and application support

# There are two ways to think about the Work Study exemption as a lever for expanding SNAP participation

- **We do not consider changing the pool of Work Study participants to increase SNAP eligibility**
  - Stakeholders expressed concerns about buy-in and feasibility (e.g., Work Study has a set of constituents that view the program aims differently)
- **We do consider how expanded outreach and application support to Work Study participants might increase SNAP participation**
  - We use the same assumptions on how outreach and application support might increase rates of participation (3 pp increase, 20% increase in SNAP participation among SNAP-eligible)
    - Work Study students are a subset of SNAP-eligible students (~5,500 of ~30,000, or ~18%)
    - Work Study students have had lower baseline rates of SNAP participation (22% vs. 28% of all SNAP-eligible students)



# Outreach efforts targeted to Work Study students generate small increases in SNAP participation

Lever	Increase in SNAP-eligible students	Modeled SNAP participation rates among eligible	Increase in overall SNAP participants
1) Federal eligibility expansion	16,000 newly eligible	17-28% of newly eligible	2,700-4,500 newly participating
2) State changes in eligibility interpretations	3,400-11,500 newly eligible	32-39% of newly eligible	1,100-4,500 newly participating
3) Expanded outreach and application support	N/A - unchanged	31-33% of all eligibles	900-1,700 newly participating
4) Targeted outreach and application support to Work Study students	N/A - unchanged	25-26% of eligibles on Work Study	170-250 newly participating

NOTE: Model estimates based on 2019-20 data; participation rates for eligible work-study students assumed to be 2019-20 rates for SNAP-eligible work-study students by institution type, plus 3 percentage points (low-end estimate) or plus 20% (high-end estimate).

# Levers that simplify and expand eligibility have larger impacts on college student SNAP participation

Lever	Increase in overall SNAP participants	Increase in overall SNAP participation rate
1) Federal eligibility expansion	2,700-4,500 newly participating	+ 1.1 to 1.9 percentage points
2) State changes in eligibility interpretations	1,100-4,500 newly participating	+ 0.4 to 1.8 percentage points
3) Expanded outreach and application support	900-1,700 newly participating	+ 0.4 to 0.7 percentage points
4) Targeted outreach and application support to Work Study students	170-250 newly participating	+ <0.1 to 0.1 percentage points

NOTE: model estimates based on 2019-20 data



# State agencies and colleges exploring SNAP support efforts must consider other factors

- Costs of different approaches (and cost-effectiveness)
- Political feasibility
- Capacity of state agencies and colleges to provide outreach, case management support
- Data and technological capacity to identify and target support to SNAP-eligible students
- Capacity at human services offices to process SNAP applications
- Administrative burden placed on college students

# We'd love your feedback on the project



Any thoughts or reflections on our findings?



What are your states, systems, and colleges doing to support college student access to SNAP (and basic needs support more broadly)?



Where should states and colleges be prioritizing basic needs efforts?



# We have several new reports available on promising approaches to basic needs support, Single Stop, and SNAP



RESEARCH  
BRIEF

## Lessons for Colleges on Delivering Basic Needs Support

Findings from a Study of Single Stop

**N**ational survey data from 2020 suggests that 23 percent of college students in the United States face food insecurity. College students also face challenges with housing, transportation, and other basic needs.

Single Stop is a program that colleges have used to assist with screening students to identify those eligible for such public benefits as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid, make referrals to community resources, and support case management by college staff. The first community college to implement Single Stop did so in 2009, and since then the program's leadership reports that more than 70 colleges have used the program.

In the spring and fall of 2021, RAND researchers conducted an evaluation of Single Stop across ten colleges in Colorado and North Carolina through interviews with college staff and students, student surveys, and analysis of administrative data to learn about the implementation and take-up of basic needs supports among college students.

Take-up of Single Stop was low across the study colleges. Only 13 percent of students assigned to Single Stop (i.e., the treatment group) completed a screener for public benefits eligibility, and fewer than 1 percent used case management support. Case managers made repeated attempts to proactively connect with students and encourage the use of

Single Stop's services, but the intervention did not penetrate in a meaningful way. Some students did not remember receiving support, many students turned the services down, and the few students who did interact with college staff did not follow up for ongoing application support and referrals. There were no differences in outcomes for those assigned to Single Stop, which was consistent with the low take-up rates.

Four important lessons emerged from the challenges colleges faced in delivering the Single Stop program (Table 1). These lessons learned from the study can be used to provide clear guidance to college staff and leadership delivering basic needs support.

### Building the Capacity for Robust Basic Needs Supports in a College Requires Time and Resources

Implementing new basic needs support programs well can take time as colleges build up leadership and staff capacity. The study colleges were all new to implementing the Single Stop program and implemented the program with varying levels of success. Prior research showed similar variation in how



Research Report

LINDSAY DAUGHERTY, BRIAN PHILLIPS, JONATHAN H. CANTOR, AMANDA PEREZ, JENNIFER KRET, MICHAEL VENTE

## Addressing College Student Food Insecurity in Colorado

Student Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and College Practices

**T**wenty-three percent of college students in the United States are food insecure (Goldrick-Rab, 2023; U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2024). Evidence suggests that food insecurity among college students is related to negative academic outcomes (Leung et al., 2021; Maroto, Snelling, and Linck, 2015; Martinez et al., 2020) and negative mental and physical health outcomes (Broton, Mohebbi, and Lingo, 2022; Bruening et al., 2018; Eisenberg et al., 2016; Elzein et al., 2017; Knol et al., 2017). Adult learners (ages 25 and older), students who are parents, and low-income students are particularly likely to face food insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, 2023; Phillips, McDaniel, and Croft, 2018), and, therefore, it might be particularly difficult for these groups of students to earn their college credentials and improve their economic circumstances (Loofbourrow and Scherr, 2023).

To provide nutritional support to college students and address food insecurity, states and postsecondary institutions have pursued a variety of approaches. For example, the number of on-campus food pantries across the country expanded from 12 in 2012 to more than 800 in 2021 (Metti, 2021), and colleges often refer students to community food pantries. Some postsecondary institutions have also distributed grocery store gift cards to students (Goldrick-Rab, Cady, and Coca, 2018). During the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, many institutions expanded the emergency aid that they offered to students, and many postsecondary institutions planned to maintain these supports after the pandemic (Klempin et al., 2024; Rodriguez, Payares-Montoya, and Cook, 2024). Emergency aid is typically a small stipend (e.g., \$1,000) and is awarded to students for varying expenses, such as car repairs, utilities, and food (Estrada-Miller et al., 2022).



RESEARCH  
BRIEF

## The Six Core Features of Student Basic Needs Support in Community Colleges

**M**any community college students are constrained by limited financial resources and are unable to meet basic food, housing, and transportation needs. Nearly 25 percent of community college students face food insecurity, and 8 percent are homeless. To support student well-being and increase the likelihood that students succeed, community colleges across the United States are scaling up basic needs supports. Federal funding provided during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic helped provide additional resources for basic needs. States and systems are also making investments to support local efforts at community colleges.

In this research brief, RAND researchers describe six core features of promising student basic needs support approaches. The goal is to provide actionable guidance for community college staff and leadership who are building and improving their supports for students. Table 1 provides an overview of the six core features of promising basic needs support approaches, and a more detailed description of these core features follows. Figure 1 provides an overview of the approach RAND researchers used in the study to identify these core features and build evidence on how colleges are implementing them on the ground.

### Comprehensive Basic Needs Support

Students have a wide variety of potential needs, and leading community colleges typically offer a variety of supports. In interviews, staff from leading colleges said that food pantries, emergency aid, and case management support were particularly common across community colleges and central to their basic needs support efforts. All college interviewees conveyed a desire to provide the full range of supports, but some colleges had capacity and resource limitations that hindered the ability to provide more-costly, long-term supports, including housing and child care. Many of the resources were broadly available to students, but colleges also offered targeted wraparound support programs that focused on certain groups of students, such as first-generation college students and former foster youth.

### Dedicated Basic Needs Staff and Partnerships

To ensure the capacity for robust basic needs support, leading colleges rely on dedicated staff with case management experience and often leverage larger teams of full-time staff, part-time staff, and students. Case managers work directly with students

All documents will be available at <https://www.rand.org/education-and-labor/projects/college-financial-and-basic-needs-support.html>

# Thank You!

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RAND Findings on College Basic Needs

