



Memorandum

TO: Councilmembers

FROM: Sarah Simpson, EMPA, Children and Family Programs Supervisor

CC: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
Kayla Schott-Bresler, Deputy Executive
Charlene Ramont, Interim Health and Community Services Director

DATE: for May 27, 2025 Council Meeting packet

RE: HEALTHY CHILDREN'S FUND AND FOOD ACCESS

Overview

On November 5, 2024, during the 2025-2026 budget discussions, Council made a motion requesting the Executive schedule a policy discussion with the Council in Q1 2025 regarding food bank funding as a use of either:

- HCF reserves from year 1-2; and/or
- Incorporation of food assistance into the upcoming HCF implementation plan.

Staff is preparing to incorporate this discussion in the Implementation Plan process this year. In preparation for robust and comprehensive discussion this summer, staff presents this informational memo outlining how the Healthy Children's Fund is addressing food security and nutrition, and to the extent that our work aligns with the Whatcom County Food System Plan.

The Healthy Children's Fund [ordinance](#) specifies investment in the following areas:

- Increase Affordable, High - Quality, Professional, and Accessible Early Learning and Child Care Opportunities.
- Help vulnerable children of all backgrounds, including homeless and at -risk children through: expanding mental and behavioral health, preventing and reducing homelessness of vulnerable children, supporting vulnerable children's parents.
- Help all children be ready for kindergarten.

The ordinance further specifies specific percentages of investment required by the County as follows: No less than 55% and no more than 68% of levy revenue and proceeds to improving early learning and



care, and no less than 20% and no more than 36% of levy revenue and proceeds to supporting vulnerable children.

Because of the specifics of the HCF ordinance's service area focus and [the Implementation Plan](#) adopted by County Council in March 2023, we use the HCF work to leverage federal, state, and community partnerships to maximize impact and align supports with the early years of a child's life—especially when it comes to food and material goods access.

[The Whatcom County Food System Plan](#) was adopted by County Council in July of 2023. This plan sets a 10-year vision for the county's food system. The HCF work aligns with the plan, particularly on Goal 4: Ensure access to healthy food for all.

Healthy Children's Fund Current Strategies Supporting Food Access

1. Basic needs in collaboration with Food Banks:

- a. The HCF funded \$1 Million dollars in basic needs (diapers, formula and hygiene products) for 14 food banks across the county.
- b. To Date the Bellingham Food Bank and 7 other partners in the Whatcom County Food Bank Network have distributed:
 - 636,287 diapers
 - 5,432 packages of formula
 - The resources were picked-up by families through 21,864 interactions/visits
- c. Funding also includes case management services at the Opportunity Council and Lydia Place to support families with young children. This funding is currently committed to through 2026.

2. Nutrition Support Through Childcare and Behavioral Health Programs: Children in childcare centers supported by HCF receive two guaranteed meals, along with snacks daily.

3. Coordinated Access to Services

- The HCF funds and partners with programs that support families and individuals in getting enrolled in on-going federally funded programs such as Supplemental Nutrition & Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program (WIC)
 - SNAP is eligible to low-income individuals and families with monthly benefits to purchase food, helping to reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition.
 - WIC offers nutrition education, healthy food, and support services to pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk.
- Collaborations and funding programs such as the Single-Entry Access to Services (SEAS Line), Lydia Place, Opportunity Council, Brigid Collins, Ferndale Community Services and Whatcom





Center for Early Learning. The mentioned providers have case management, resource referral programs and offer support to families to help increase benefit navigation and access.

4. Leveraging Federal and Community Resources:

Ongoing conversations with the HCT Implementation Team include: How to combine local and external funds to create a more complete package of services for families and in order to leverage other resources would it be prudent for HCF strategies to support restoration or enlargement of Federal and State programs with universal access. For example, before the pandemic, certain resources (like school meals and outreach programs) had higher availability and impact, and there is a need for re-expansion of these services.

Alignment with the Whatcom County Food System Plan: The Whatcom County Food System Plan lays out a vision for an equitable, resilient, and accessible food system. HCF efforts align particularly with Goal 4: Ensure access to healthy food for all, which calls for investments in food infrastructure, affordability, and policy solutions that reduce food insecurity. **Key alignments include:**

Current Healthy Children's Fund Strategies	Alignment	Whatcom County Food System Plan
Funding Infant Basic Needs	Food System Plan Action 4.1.6	: Enhancing food bank capacity and addressing service gaps
Childcare meal programs	Action 4.3.6	: Supporting universal school and early childhood nutrition programs.
WIC/SNAP navigation support	Actions 4.3.3 and 4.3.4	: Improving accessibility and effectiveness of state nutrition programs
Engagement in cross-sector partnerships		mirrors the Plan's emphasis on community collaboration and systems coordination.
Identifying leveraging points to bring in additional funding (state, federal, philanthropic).	4.3.4	Advocate that the state increase funding in the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition program



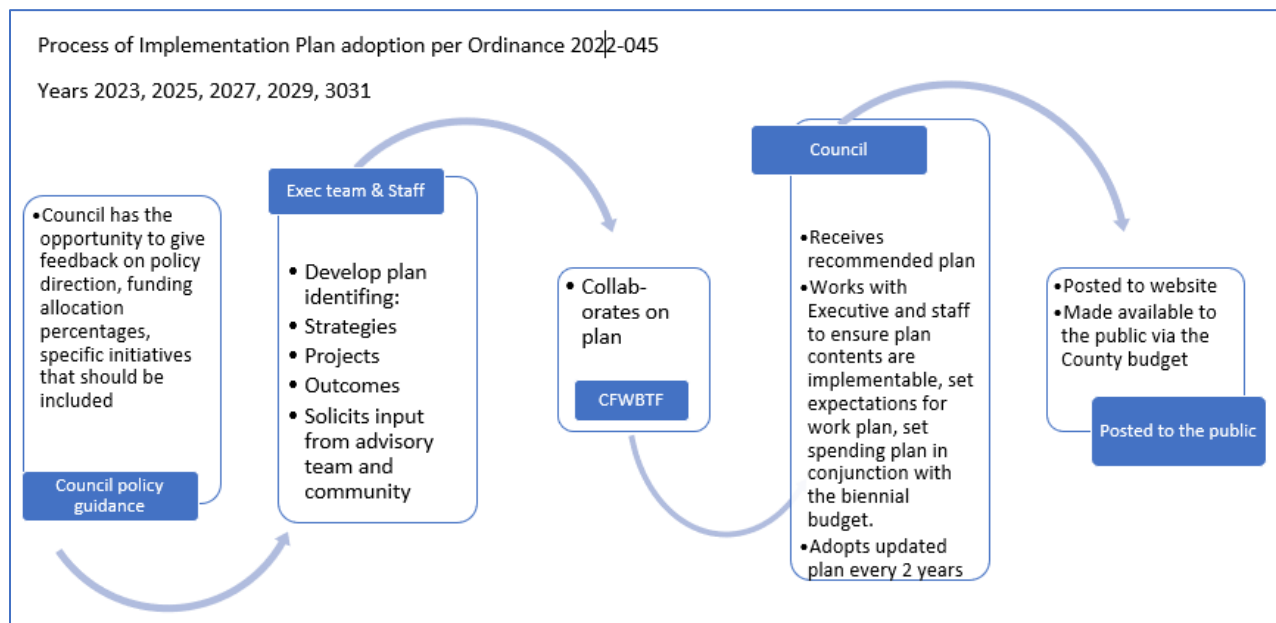
Continuing current contracts with flexibility for expansion, particularly to include actual food purchases for local programs that serve HCF qualifying families.		<u>The Whatcom County Council Approved 10-year Food System Plan</u>
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Next Steps and Considerations

We understand the Council's desire to discuss food access. Per the Council resolution referenced at the beginning of this memo, **staff will include a food policy discussion during the upcoming Healthy Children's fund Implementation Plan process this summer.**

- Council can expect a special work session in July to begin the work on the Implementation Plan for 2026-2027.
- This work will continue throughout the summer as we assist Council in adopting a plan as per Healthy Children's Fund ordinance every two years.

The following chart outlines the upcoming process:



We appreciate your leadership and look forward to deepening this partnership. Please contact Sarah Simpson at 360-410-2400 if there are any questions.