



# Policy Codesign to Improve Food Access & Promote Racial Equity

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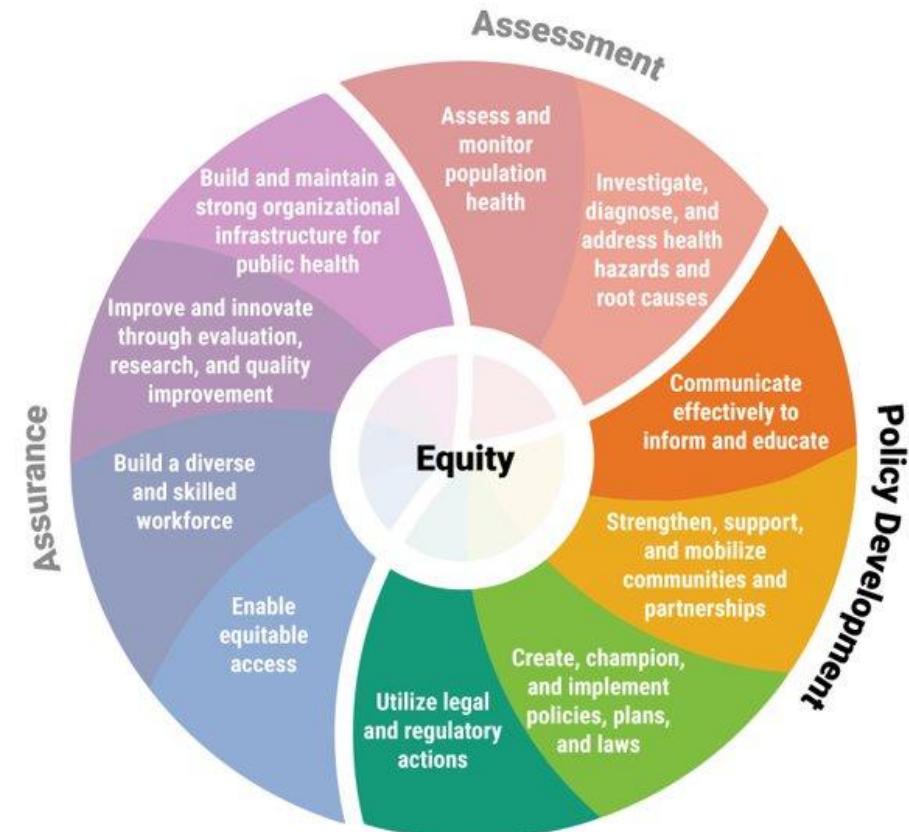
**Barbara Barquero**, Assistant Professor, University of Washington

King County Board of Health, January 29, 2026



# Why Codesign Policy Solutions?

- Framework for how to include multiple **perspectives**
- Including a variety of perspectives ensures that **policy solutions** meet **community needs** while being **feasible** in the eyes of policy makers
- Creative problem-solving using **human-centered** design thinking



# 2024-2029 Public Health Strategic Plan

- Serve as a bold leader in policy development and change
- Develop subject matter experts' ability to assess the impact of proposed policy changes and to propose new policies
- Use data and community input to guide policy development and change
- [kingcounty.gov/health/strategicplan](http://kingcounty.gov/health/strategicplan)



# Food Access is a Community Health Priority

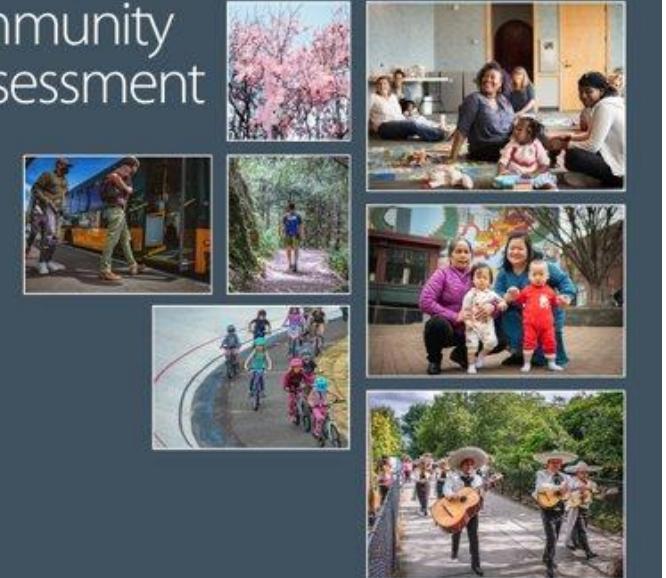
**3X**  
County average

**Food insecurity** for Hispanic, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander adults is nearly three times the county average

**2.5X**  
higher

For transgender adults, the rate is nearly 2.5 times higher than for cisgender adults

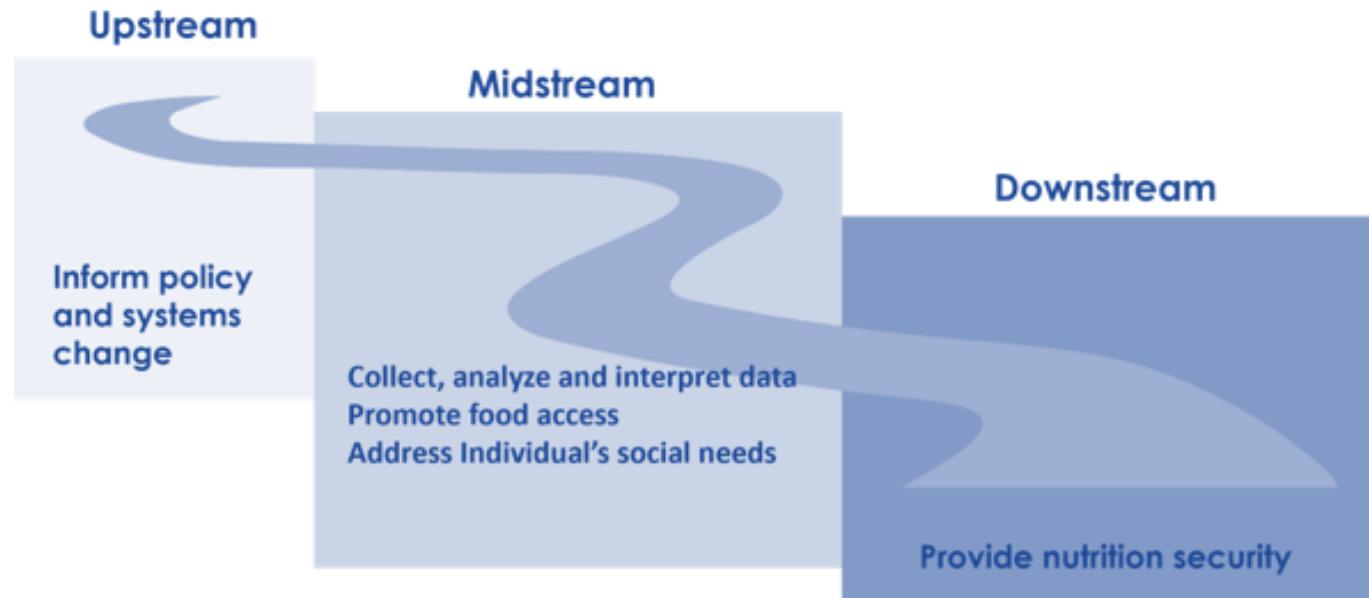
King County Community Health Needs Assessment  
2024/2025



The King County [Community Health Needs Assessment 2024/2025](#) and Community Navigators identified food access as a priority

# Goals and Outcomes

- Pilot a Codesign project to be replicated for future topics
- Address upstream drivers that lead to food insecurity
- Policy recommendation tailored to Public Health - Seattle & King County
- Create toolkit for other health departments



# Policy Codesign is a Participatory, Creative Process

10-15 people come together to develop policy recommendations



Collectively create a list of policy recommendations ranking policies from highest to lowest priority

Identify shared values, review policy information and discuss community experiences

Develop an implementation plan to ensure the recommendations move forward

The codesign team  
developed **policy**  
**recommendations** to  
improve food access



# Recruited a Multiple Sector Codesign Team



American  
Heart  
Association.



**AntiHUNGER  
&  
Nutrition  
COALITION**



# Additional Teams Offered Broader Perspectives



## Community knowledge

Consisted of grassroots organizations and people with firsthand experience.  
12 members.



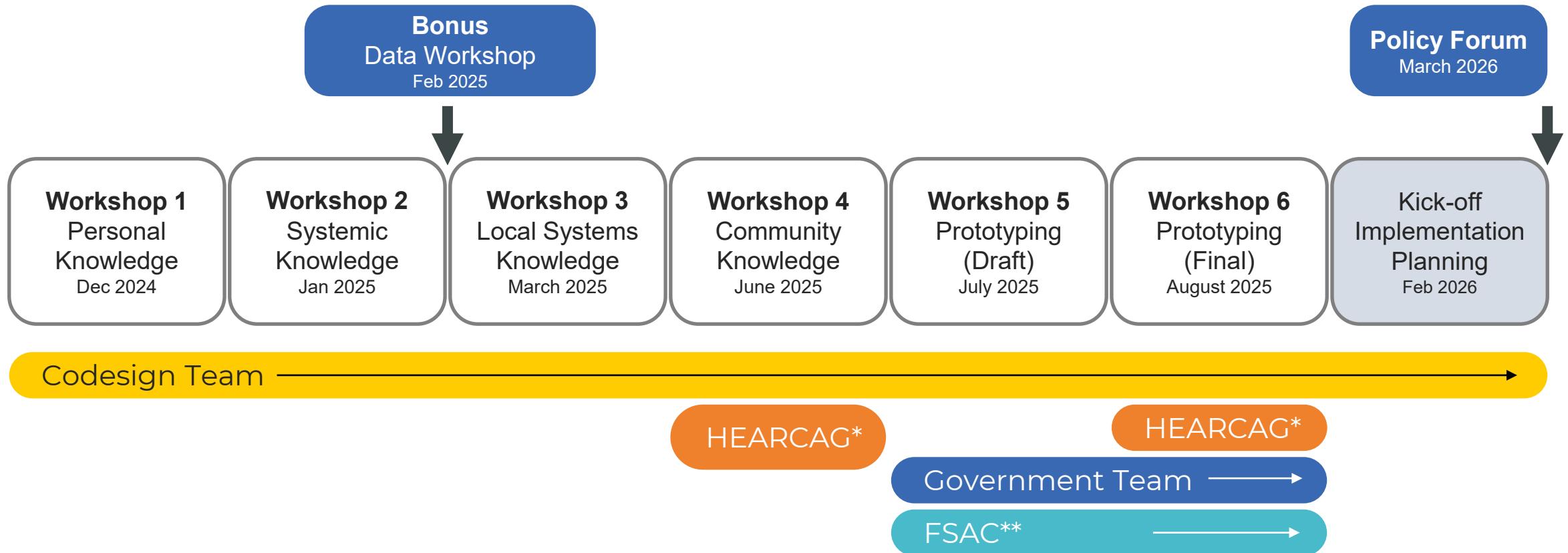
## Advisory team

8 members from King County's Local Food Initiative Food Systems Advisory Council



## Advisory team

7 King County staff members working toward better food access



\* HEARCAG: Health Equity and Anti-Racism Community Advisory Group

\*\* FSAC: Food System Advisory Council

# First Phase: Eliciting Ideas

## *Workshops 1- 4*

- Completed a policy review and evaluated evidence
- Mapped King County services, systems, funding and how people interact with them
- Heard from communities with lived experience



**Results:** Common emerging themes used to develop policy principles



## Second Phase: Prototyping Workshop 5

- Developed a set of policy principles which served as the criteria for choosing policy strategies



**Pursue bold systems changes towards food sovereignty** rooted in the idea that food is a basic right.



**Center people experiencing food insecurity and the community-based organizations** that serve them in policy design and implementation.



**Leverage and strengthen existing infrastructure and systems**, including removing barriers and restrictive processes that hinder food access.



**Engage continuously with community-based organizations** in programs and solutions.



Protect and improve food access for communities through **economic and community development**.

# Second Phase: Prototyping

## Workshop 6

- Developed three policy strategies based on the policy principles



### Guaranteed Basic Income

Guaranteed cash payments to people meeting certain eligibility requirements to buy what they need most



### Countywide Produce Subsidy

Expand and enhance an existing program that provides \$60 monthly benefits for fruits and vegetables



### Healthy Food Retail in Low-Income Areas

Support grocery stores in underserved areas to ensure neighbors have places to buy nutritious foods.

# Voting Criteria for Policy Strategies

Factor	Low	High
Political will		
Time		
Cost/money		
Public supporters		
Opposition		
Existing efforts		
Impact – numbers of people		
Alignment with policy principles		
Will this activate allies? i.e. forum attendees		

# Recommended Policy: Countywide Produce Subsidy

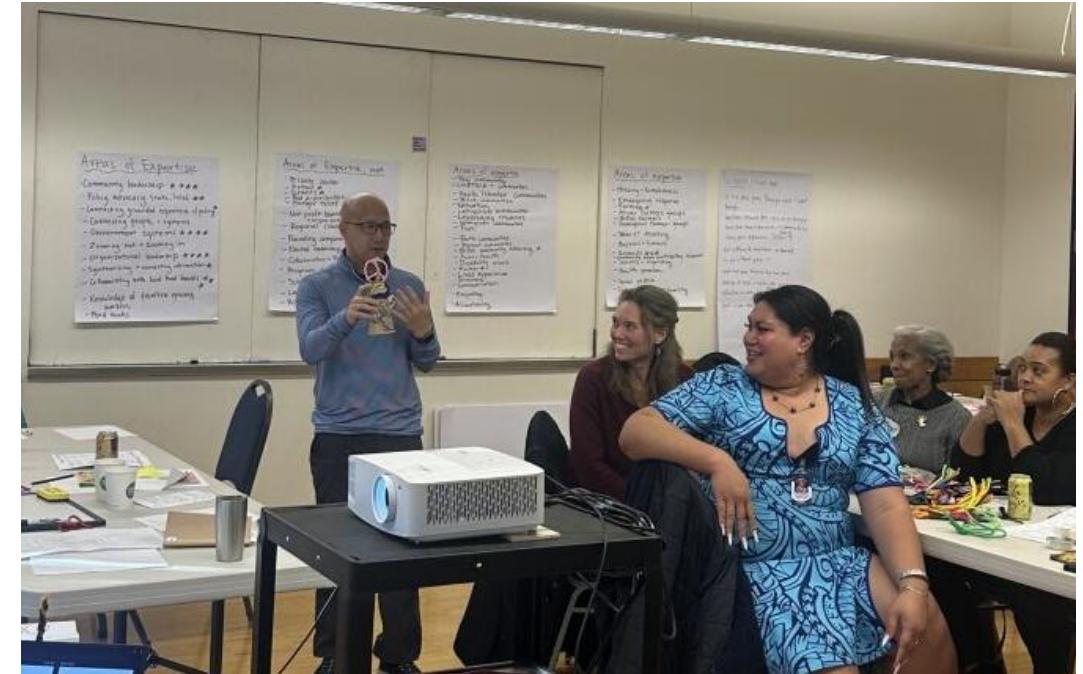
- Recognizes the success of the Fresh Bucks program
- Builds on an already supported and widely recognized model
- Offers opportunities to expand the network of participating retailers
- Serves as a local response to recent SNAP cuts
- Closest to giving people cash

**ELECTRONIC MONTHLY  
CASH BENEFIT  
SPECIFICALLY FOR PURCHASING  
FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**



# Reflections from Codesign Members

- Able to share lessons learned from our direct services
- Elevate the voices of the communities Codesign members partner with
- Help shape policies that reflect real need
- Align with King County's goals for equitable, community driven solutions

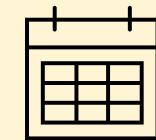


## Next Step: Community Sounding Board

- Host a food insecurity policy forum to raise awareness, collect feedback and build momentum around policy funding and community strategies to improve food access.



- “Food Access Now: Advancing Local Solutions to Food Insecurity” is **scheduled** for March 24, 2026, at Highline College.





# Thank you!

## Questions? Contact:

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For accessibility concerns or complaints contact: [ADAPublicHealth@kingcounty.gov](mailto:ADAPublicHealth@kingcounty.gov)

