

# Community-Based Harm Reduction and Affordable Nutritional Support for Women

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## Background

**Harm Reduction** is focused on reducing the negative consequences of something on relevant parties. It mitigates potentially harmful impacts by targeting individual behaviors, broad initiatives, or systemic changes. While harm reduction does not eliminate the issue at hand, it does provide practical strategies and resources that support the wellbeing of those impacted.

**Food Insecurity and Gender Disparities**

- In 2025, 240,000 females were using SNAP benefits in CT vs 121,000 males.<sup>2</sup>
- Per the State of Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) in 2023:
  - 73% of single-female-headed families and 59% of single-male-headed families were below the ALICE threshold, compared to 18% of married-parent families.<sup>10</sup>
  - 32% single-female-headed with children were above the poverty line vs 17% single-male-headed w/ children.<sup>10</sup>

**Economic vulnerabilities contribute to food insecurity and significant health outcomes.**

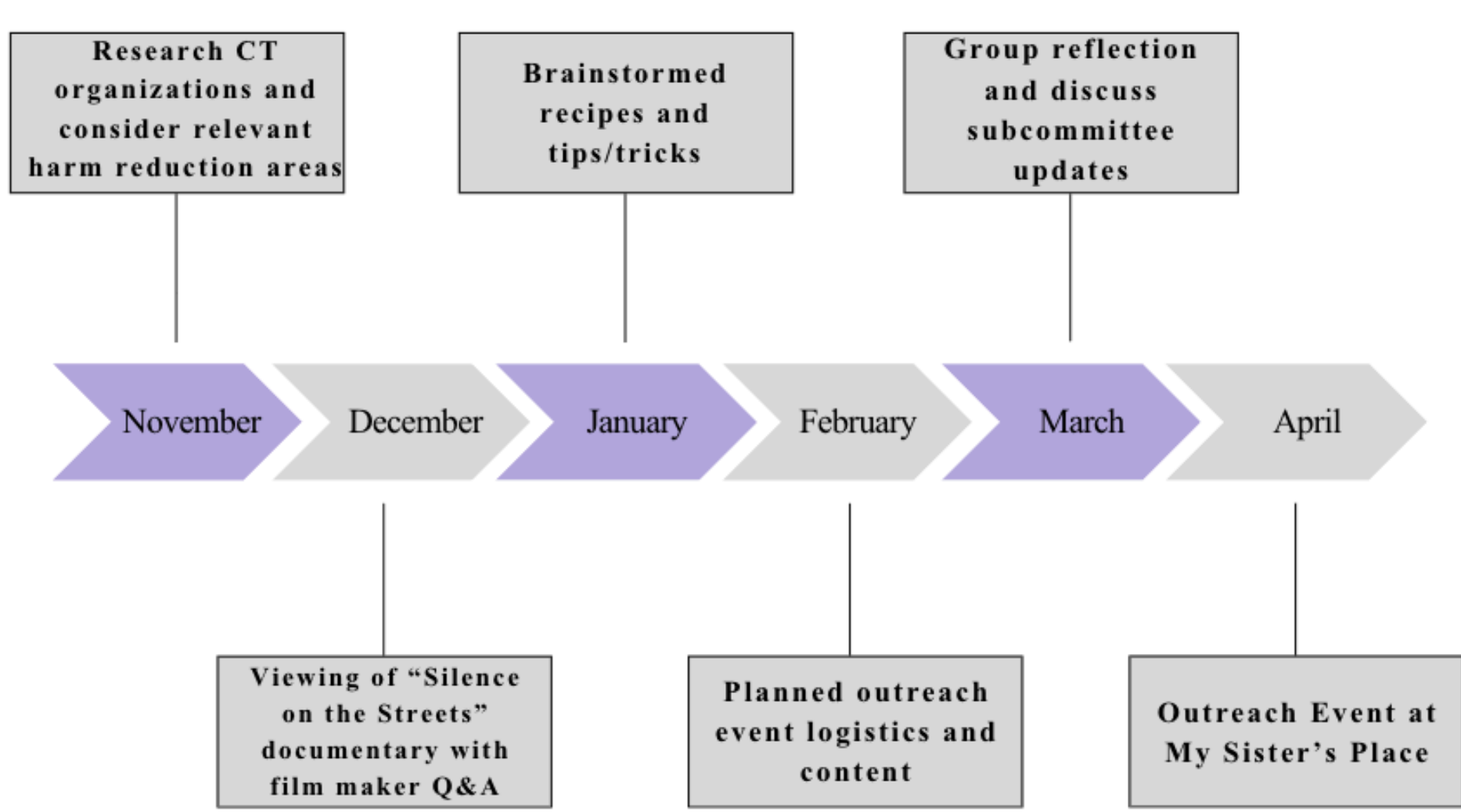
- Findings from a 12-state study which included 66,553 participants assessed the relationship between food insecurity and obesity.
  - Within the female subgroup they found that obesity was significantly associated with food insecurity among women with the odds ratio being 1.48 (95% CI 1.27-1.72).<sup>7</sup>
- Food insecurity is associated with 41% increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease.
  - Individuals with cardiovascular disease who are experiencing food insecurity are disproportionately women or identify as black.<sup>6</sup>
  - Women experiencing financial constraints face unique barriers to healthy eating which are not adequately addressed by current resources and support.

## Objectives

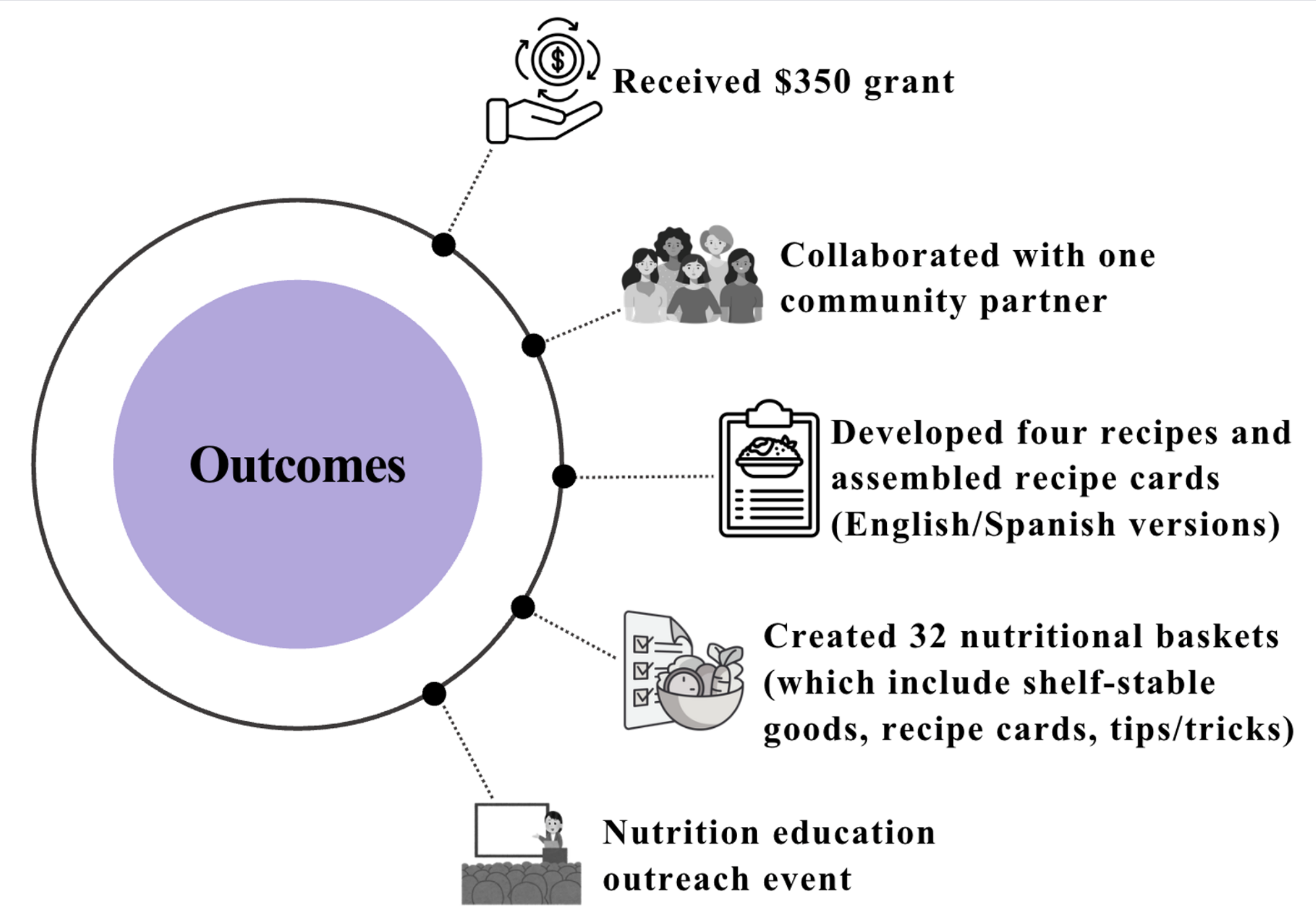
- Describe the severity of food insecurity among women compared to other patient populations.
- Develop a tangible nutrition-focused harm-reduction deliverable for women experiencing financial constraints.
- Host an outreach event to distribute nutrition baskets consisting of recipe cards and non-perishable food products and provide education regarding affordable nutrition strategies.
- Collaborate with My Sister's Place, our community partner, to optimize our outreach to women struggling with food insecurity.

## Methods

The group used a multi-modal approach - incorporating strategies such as brainstorming, research, connection to subject matter experts, leveraging of existing resources, development of materials, community outreach, and group reflection survey.



## Results



## Women's Health Interest Group Reflections

"Teaches me to think holistically and consider factors that significantly impact a patient's recovery path as well as general factors."

"Reinforces the importance of connecting individuals to resources, advocating for their needs, and working collaboratively with other professionals to provide the best possible care and support."



"Learning to apply harm reduction principles fundamentally changes provider-patient dynamic by dismantling stigma, building rapport, and promoting health equity."

"Although it is important to inform our patients on the ideal practices such as nutrition recommendations, it is more important that we have the empathy to understand that not everybody has the resources available to follow guidelines perfectly, no matter how hard they are trying to work."

## My Sister's Place Spotlight

My Sister's Place is a non-profit organization located in Hartford, CT, that provides emergency housing, affordable housing, and supportive services to single women and women with families. They aim to empower individuals through creative and compassionate strategies to end homelessness. My Sister's Place is an affiliate of Community Housing Advocates (CHA) who work to create sustainable and safe communities and prevent homelessness and housing insecurity in low-income families. Collaborating with My Sister's Place offers us the opportunity to interact with our target population and educate about affordable nutrition strategies.

## Conclusion

Harm reduction strategies can be applied to nutrition/food insecurity among women. Through an interprofessional approach and community collaboration, we developed strategies that support healthier choices within financial constraints. We were able to emphasize the value of community-based, low-cost approaches in reducing health disparities. In the future, we can apply the knowledge gained to identify further ways to engage with community members and promote adoption of healthier habits - while remaining mindful of social and economic constraints.

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## References & Other Materials



Recipes were created collaboratively using general cooking knowledge, inspiration from online resources, and AI-assisted support - with specific focus on utilization of shelf-stable goods.

