

EMBARGOED UNTIL
SEPTEMBER 23, 2022



ELEVATING

VOICES

TO END HUNGER

TOGETHER



PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 2022

**Community-Driven
Solutions to Address
America's Hunger Crisis**

**FEEDING
AMERICA**

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the tens of thousands of individuals facing hunger across the country who shared insights with Feeding America by participating in listening sessions, completing questionnaires and more as part of the *Elevating Voices to End Hunger Together* nationwide community listening initiative. Your experiences are vital in the effort to create equitable solutions to end hunger in the U.S.

The following Feeding America network food banks and state food bank associations mobilized quickly to host listening sessions for community members facing hunger as part of this initiative.

The *Elevating Voices to End Hunger Together* initiative was a collaborative effort. Feeding America food banks and their staff members along with national office staff contributed to this project in meaningful ways.

We are also grateful to M+R, PerryUndem and Precision Strategies for their assistance with gathering and analyzing the insights collected through this initiative.

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Alameda County Community Food Bank | Feeding Westchester | The Idaho Foodbank |
| Arizona Food Bank Network | Food Bank for Larimer County | Long Island Cares, Inc. |
| California Association of Food Banks | Food Bank of Delaware | Mid-Ohio Foodbank |
| Central Pennsylvania Food Bank | Food Bank of Northern Nevada | Montana Food Bank Network |
| Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma | Food Bank of South Jersey | Philabundance |
| Community Food Bank of New Jersey | Food Bank of the Rockies | Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York |
| Connecticut Foodshare | Food Bank of the Southern Tier | Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma |
| El Pasoans Fighting Hunger Food Bank | Food Finders Food Bank Inc. | River Bend Food Bank |
| Facing Hunger Foodbank | Food Gatherers | San Francisco-Marín Food Bank |
| Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin | Food Lifeline | Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida |
| Feeding Colorado | Foodlink Inc. | Second Harvest Foodbank of Clark, Champaign, & Logan Counties |
| Feeding Indiana's Hungry | Foodshare | Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest North Carolina |
| Feeding Louisiana | Forgotten Harvest | Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County |
| Feeding New York State | Fredericksburg Regional Food Bank | Second Harvest Inland Northwest |
| Feeding Northeast Florida | Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana Inc. | Southeast Missouri Food Bank |
| Feeding South Dakota | Good Shepherd Food Bank | St. Louis Area Foodbank |
| Feeding Southwest Virginia | The Greater Boston Food Bank | Tarrant Area Food Bank |
| Feeding Texas | Greater Chicago Food Depository | Three Square Food Bank |
| Feeding the Gulf Coast | Greater Cleveland Food Bank Inc. | Treasure Coast Food Bank |
| Feeding Washington | Greater Lansing Food Bank | Vermont Foodbank |
| | Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank | |
| | Great Plains Food Bank | |
| | Houston Food Bank | |

These organizations and many more Feeding America network members also contributed to the *Elevating Voices to End Hunger Together* initiative by distributing questionnaires, participating in a peer-to-peer texting program and taking other actions to gather input from people in the communities they serve. This project would not have been possible without the tremendous efforts of these food banks and state food bank associations.



**There is
a hunger
crisis in
America.**

INTRODUCTION

Last year, 1 in 6 people in the U.S.—**53 million people**—sought help from the charitable food sector. People like Michael and Elizabeth, a married couple from Colorado Springs.

“A lot of times we have struggles with getting groceries, mainly because it’s too expensive,” said Michael, a member of the military stationed at Fort Carson.

To help fill the gaps, Elizabeth visits the local food bank. “I go there once a week, sometimes twice a week to help out with the groceries,” Elizabeth said, “not just for us, but for our friends and neighbors. We see a lot of military families that are struggling financially.”

As the nation’s largest domestic hunger-relief organization, the Feeding America network provides food and resources to the tens of millions of people facing hunger today while also working with an ecosystem of partners, including the people we serve, to address the root causes of hunger. Our vision is an America where no one is hungry.

The White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health—the first event of its kind in more than 50 years—is an opportunity to elevate the voices of people facing hunger and partner with them to forge a national movement including community leaders, faith-based organizations, food banks, advocates, policymakers, companies and nonprofits working together to ultimately end hunger in America.

To help ensure the voices of people facing hunger are meaningfully represented in the White House conference, the Feeding America network of 200 food banks, 21 statewide associations and over 60,000 faith-based and charitable partner agencies, food pantries and meal programs sought input from tens of thousands of individuals across the country. This nationwide community listening initiative—*Elevating Voices to End Hunger Together*—included listening sessions, an in-depth survey, questionnaires and text message outreach. Feeding America engaged 130,000 people, resulting in responses from nearly 36,000 individuals across all 50 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico.

“**Espero tener salud y potencial para sobrellevar y mejorar todo esto nada es facil pero imposible tampoco.**

CHESTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

I hope to have health and potential to prosper and better my surroundings; nothing is easy, but nothing is impossible either.

**ELEVATING
VOICES
TO END HUNGER
TOGETHER**

This first-of-its-kind report elevates the experiences, concerns and ideas of people across the U.S. who have felt the impacts of food insecurity firsthand. The report also includes a range of policy recommendations for lawmakers on how to meet the needs of people facing hunger today and address the root causes of food insecurity to eradicate hunger. This work must focus on eliminating the policies, practices and systems that perpetuate racially and geographically disparate rates of hunger.

Over the course of our three-month community listening initiative, we heard about the challenges our neighbors in need are facing. Seventy-five percent of respondents to Feeding America's survey report making big trade-offs—impossible choices—to afford food. Nearly 4 in 10 have used emergency funds/savings to pay for food, 25% have skipped a doctor's visit and 21% have skipped or delayed paying a utility bill.

"I have not bought groceries in months to make sure I have money for gas to get to work," said a person in Ellis County, Texas.

"Even though I have insurance through my employer the co pay amounts are frequently \$75 to \$250, and I skip appointments because it's a choice of eating or going to the doctor," said another person, in Lake County, Florida.

But our neighbors also shared their aspirations for the future. They hope for economic stability, access to nutritious food, affordable health care, and resources to support children and families—in short, communities where everyone can access the food and resources they need to thrive. And they have ideas, grounded in personal experience, about how to get there.

The policy recommendations supported by our neighbors facing hunger are grounded in prioritizing dignity, increasing access, expanding opportunity and improving health.



“We need more resources for the people who don’t have transportation,” said a person in Tunica County, Mississippi. “Our community is a long way from a grocery store.”

“If you want to help me ... increase my food stamps so I can afford to eat healthy food that will lower my blood sugar and reduce the number of meds I’m on,” said another person. “That will lower my cholesterol and ... reduce my stress, anxiety, and blood pressure so I don’t have a heart attack or stroke. Food is the answer.”

“There is not one-size-fits-all and I literally have fallen through nearly every crack. Create flexibility in programs so that people can qualify,” said a person in Cass County, North Dakota.

The best ideas for ending hunger often come from the communities experiencing it. Feeding America is committed to working alongside neighbors facing hunger and other partners to advance policies and identify solutions to address root causes and end hunger for all. By working together, we can create a stronger future for individuals, families and our nation.

Let’s listen, then let’s get to work.

“ I have not bought groceries in months to make sure I have money for gas to get to work.

ELLIS COUNTY, TEXAS

“ Even though I have insurance through my employer the copay amounts are frequently \$75 to \$250, and I skip appointments because it’s a choice of eating or going to the doctor.

LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA

A close-up portrait of a middle-aged man with a grey beard and mustache, wearing a dark bucket hat and a dark t-shirt. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred construction site with rebar and concrete. The text "Let's listen, then let's get to work." is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font on the left side of the image. There are decorative white vertical bars of varying heights at the top and bottom of the image.

**Let's
listen,
then let's
get to
work.**

Elevating Voices to End Hunger Together is an initiative to gather input from people with lived experience through listening sessions, surveys, questionnaires and texts. Insights presented are from nearly 36,000 people across the country who self-identified as facing challenges getting the food they need. They are not representative of all people facing hunger.

METHODOLOGY

To collect input from people with lived experience across the U.S., Feeding America connected with individuals and families through listening sessions, a survey, questionnaires and text messaging. More information on each outreach strategy is available below.

LISTENING SESSIONS

The Feeding America network conducted 126 listening sessions with community members who have faced hunger. In total, 1,047 people participated in listening sessions hosted by 51 food banks and state food bank associations across 29 states. These sessions took place from June 24 through Aug. 24, 2022. Feeding America partnered with Precision Strategies to analyze the insights shared by listening session participants.

SURVEY

Feeding America engaged the nonpartisan research firm PerryUndem to conduct a national survey of people with lived experience to gather insight into these individuals' lives and the solutions they think could help end hunger in their communities. The 18-minute national survey was offered in English and Spanish and conducted from May 27 through June 21, 2022, using YouGov's online panel.

The survey included 1,317 adults ages 18 and older with lived experience in the last two years. Just under half (46%) of respondents have visited a food bank. Thirty-five percent of survey respondents are Black adults and about 24% are Latino/Hispanic adults.

The margin of sampling error for the total results is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

QUESTIONNAIRES

Feeding America distributed an online questionnaire in English and Spanish as another way for people with lived experience to share what they and their communities need to thrive. The Feeding America network shared the link to the questionnaire through QR codes at food distributions, on social media and through other channels.

In total, we collected 24,742 completed questionnaires. We received 23,825 questionnaires completed in English and 917 questionnaires completed in Spanish. The questionnaires were collected from June 15 through Aug. 24, 2022. Feeding America partnered with Precision Strategies to analyze the insights from the questionnaires.

TEXT MESSAGE OUTREACH

The Feeding America network used peer-to-peer texting to reach out to 102,049 people with lived experience to ask them about what they need to thrive. Volunteers sent text messages, in both English and Spanish, from Aug. 8-19. We received 8,685 text message responses (an 8.7% response rate). Feeding America partnered with M+R on the peer-to-peer efforts. Precision Strategies helped analyze the insights from the text message outreach.



Prioritizing Dignity

PRIORITIZING DIGNITY

One message Feeding America heard loud and clear from people facing hunger: Anti-hunger policies must prioritize the dignity and agency of the people they are designed to impact.

Policymakers must ensure benefit amounts are sufficient to allow our neighbors in need to keep adequate amounts of nutritious food on the table. Appropriately leveled benefits will maintain the dignity of choice for people receiving food assistance. Individuals and families should choose which foods will help them thrive—not lawmakers.

Logistical hurdles, complex eligibility and application rules, and associated stigma can converge to choke access to federal assistance programs and create feelings of shame. People facing hunger emphasized the need to reduce the stigma around federal food assistance and break down barriers that prevent qualified individuals from successfully applying for hunger-relief programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Insights from our neighbors facing hunger can help Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) improve the design of federal nutrition programs to make them more effective, equitable and inclusive.

“**I’m willing to work, I’m willing to get creative. But when my income is so low, it’s hard to get by, and with the income, I don’t qualify for benefits.**

PENNSYLVANIA



Insights from People Facing Hunger

People facing hunger largely agreed that increasing access to higher-quality, nutritious food is an essential component of centering human dignity while ending food insecurity. One person in Cartersville, Georgia, said they did not want to “feed [their] child inferior food because [they] can’t afford fresh food.”

The people Feeding America spoke with identified improving benefit levels and eligibility requirements for government assistance programs as solutions to help more individuals in need afford nutritious foods.

“The poverty level required for SNAP is ridiculously low and many struggling families do not qualify,” said a person in Smithville, Ohio. “My husband is a 100% disabled veteran and our family makes slightly too much to qualify for benefits, but inflation costs of everything from food, gas, housing and utilities have exploded. We have to be very selective in buying meats especially and have severely reduced the amount we feed our family (which includes 3 children under age 10 but over the age of WIC).”

“I’m willing to work, I’m willing to get creative. But when my income is so low, it’s hard to get by, and with the income, I don’t qualify for benefits,” said a person in Pennsylvania.

Another way to increase the effectiveness of federal nutrition programs, while respecting the dignity of program participants, is to improve enrollment processes. When people facing hunger shared their experiences with trying to access federal food assistance, they frequently mentioned both logistical hurdles and feelings of shame.

One person said: “When you go to DHHS, they make you feel like it’s coming out of their personal pocket and they don’t want to give it to you. And for people who need it, they feel so bad afterward. They ask you for personal info. ... Shouldn’t make a person feel less b/c they are coming to ask for help. Some of the systems make you feel less.”

People facing hunger also identified ways to improve the user experience within the charitable food system. A survey respondent in Carroll County, Georgia, described barriers to receiving food at a food bank due to the “[requirement of] standing in line in the heat and then [not offering] enough healthy food.”

WIC

is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

Policy Recommendations

The following anti-hunger policy recommendations—informed by people facing hunger—**prioritize the dignity of individuals and families seeking food assistance.**

Congress should increase SNAP benefit levels and expand eligibility criteria to help more people buy more nutritious foods. Seventy-eight percent of respondents to Feeding America’s survey recommended increasing SNAP benefits so families can purchase sufficient quantities of nutritious foods. Meanwhile, 83% of survey respondents supported raising the income limits for SNAP to include more families facing hunger.

Congress should expand options for people receiving SNAP benefits by increasing funding for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) and other proven approaches that encourage healthy food purchases, instead of limiting choices. Eighty-eight percent of survey respondents agreed it was very important or somewhat important to support people’s dignity and choices in what they feed their families, regardless of whether they receive food assistance. Further, 78% of respondents want SNAP to make it easier to access healthy foods, not restrict food choices.

The USDA and Congress should simplify SNAP eligibility and enrollment for older adults, college students, immigrants and other groups who face additional barriers to access.

The USDA should encourage states to take steps to reduce barriers to The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) eligibility, such as minimizing paperwork for people seeking assistance.

The administration and Congress should work with tribes to increase food security in Native American communities, including allowing tribal governments to administer federal programs. Congress should allow participants in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) to receive SNAP benefits as well.

Congress should allow U.S. territories to participate in SNAP, rather than the capped and less-accessible Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) block grants.





Increasing Access

INCREASING ACCESS

Everyone in the U.S. should have access to the food and resources they need to thrive, no matter their race, background or ZIP code. Policymakers must eliminate the barriers that prevent many people from accessing grocery stores and food assistance.

Insights from our neighbors facing hunger demonstrate the ways hunger intersects with and is exacerbated by other issues, like access to transportation. Federal policymakers, and others, can use these insights to help ensure policies meet people where they are and address the various factors that contribute to food insecurity.

“ We need better access to fresh food. Some people have to drive 25 miles to get to the closest grocery store. Transportation is a huge struggle for us in rural areas. ”

Insights from People Facing Hunger

The charitable food system and federal nutrition programs provide critical support to people facing hunger. But people's ability to access such services and benefits varies greatly between communities. Nearly half (49%) of the people Feeding America surveyed said their communities need more food pantries, grocery stores and fresh food to thrive. This is especially true for people living in rural areas, where the distances between homes, stores and food pantries are longer and food options are more limited.

Limited sources of quality food and food assistance are exacerbated by disparities in transportation access. Many of our neighbors in need have a hard time reaching food pantries and grocery stores. Some cannot afford a vehicle, gas and maintenance costs on top of other living expenses.

Forty-three percent of English questionnaire respondents told Feeding America that limited transportation is a root cause of hunger. Twenty-six percent of Spanish questionnaire respondents have cut back on transportation costs in the last two years to get food for themselves or others in their households.

An individual in Parkville, Maryland, shared with us about the choices they have to make between rent, utilities, food and gas costs: "I make \$40,000 / year and can't find an average apartment near where I work. Rent near work is approximately \$1,400/ month plus utilities. I have to live an hour commute away. I use up 2 tanks of gas a week. Do I pay that high rent and eat very little? Or live far away and use finances for gas?"

Public transportation can help individuals without private vehicles access grocery stores, food assistance and employment opportunities, but many communities lack the necessary infrastructure. A person in Illinois said, "In my community since there is no public transportation you must either have a vehicle or access to a ride to receive benefits." This especially impacts neighbors in rural communities, with one person in Carlton, Georgia, saying, "The rural county where I live has no public transportation, not even small shuttle buses. I would appreciate knowing there was alternative transportation for when I have to give up driving."

Long distances between food access sites and inadequate public transportation create challenges for seniors, especially. Many older adults live on fixed incomes, limiting their ability to afford transportation options. Others cannot drive or may struggle with long wait times at food distributions.

"There is no public transportation in my area," said a person in Porter County, Indiana. "I am a senior. I don't want to

CONT.

CONT.

drive all the time. Some of my friends should not be driving. I saw a much older woman last week barefoot, on a walker, putting gas in her car. The pantry lines in cars is annoying and long. My car dies in the lines because of mechanical issues.”

As another way to address accessibility challenges, 41% of respondents to Feeding America’s English questionnaire prioritized increasing funding for nonprofits and food banks serving rural areas.

People facing hunger also largely agreed that policymakers must ensure children are not impacted by limited access to food assistance in their communities.

One parent in Northampton County, Pennsylvania, said, “Honestly, for me I am aware of a lot of the resources in our community. Sometimes I cannot access them because of my work schedule. An example would be summer lunches for kids. There are plenty of places to get them; however, because I am at work I do not have access.”



“**The rural county where I live has no public transportation, not even small shuttle buses. I would appreciate knowing there was alternative transportation for when I have to give up driving.**

CARLTON, GEORGIA

Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations—
informed by people facing hunger—will
increase access to grocery stores and
food assistance.

Congress should increase The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) funding—for food purchases as well as storage and distribution costs—through the 2023 Farm Bill. This will help ensure food banks can remain open and develop the infrastructure needed to serve all neighbors facing food insecurity.

The USDA should continue to identify opportunities to provide funds for food distribution as part of commodity support purchases funded through Section 32, the Commodity Credit Corporation and other sources. The USDA should also support more rural development grants and funds, which could be used by food banks to support mobile pantries and grocery stores in areas that need them.

The USDA should support innovative food access and transportation solutions, including funding for food delivery interventions, food lockers and mobile food distributions.

People facing hunger noted the need to **provide services that are tailored to seniors, including food delivery to people who face transportation or mobility challenges.**

People facing hunger support **investing in public transportation infrastructure.**

Congress should improve and simplify access to the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program by allowing more schools to offer free meals to all students by expanding community eligibility and increasing opportunities to directly certify children for free meals.

Congress should provide more flexibility for summer meal programs, including allowing kids to eat meals off-site, streamlining regulations, and lowering the area eligibility requirement to better serve rural communities.

Congress should extend the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) program into a permanent Summer EBT program to boost families' food budgets during summer breaks and when youth meals are not otherwise available through school and child care settings.

Congress should ensure all families in need have access to WIC benefits by expanding eligibility, streamlining and extending certification, and supporting the continued integration of technology to modernize service delivery.

Congress should support military families in need by removing the basic housing allowance from the SNAP calculation and strengthening the basic needs allowance.

Congress should create a transitional SNAP benefit for servicemembers who are separating from the military, to reduce food insecurity among veterans.

Congress and the administration should bolster food security efforts based at Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals and focus on the root causes of hunger among veterans. Many food banks within the Feeding America network have long-standing partnerships for on-site pantries within VA hospitals and clinics.





Expanding Opportunity

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY

While expanding access to nutritious food is an essential component of ending hunger in America, policymakers must also understand food insecurity is a symptom of many intersecting root causes, such as economic and social conditions, race and geography.

A thriving economy with well-paying jobs is the most effective long-term solution to fight hunger. Even before the pandemic, millions of working individuals and families faced challenges putting food on the table, in part due to stagnant wages for lower-paid workers. The federal government should pursue economic and fiscal policies to support a strong and sustainable economic recovery that creates jobs and equitable economic growth. This is the path to ensuring everyone in America can meet their basic needs and build a strong future for their children.

Such policies must address challenges faced by communities that experience disproportionately high rates of food insecurity, including communities of color. These disparities are a result of racism and other deeply rooted systemic issues. It is critical that solutions to address racial equity are developed by and with individuals and organizations already leading anti-hunger work in these communities.

“**I would love to have enough money and assistance that I won’t have to worry that I won’t be able to pay my bills, that my heat and electric would never be turned off. That I always have access to food and milk for my daughter and granddaughter.**

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

Insights from People Facing Hunger

People facing hunger—50% of English questionnaire respondents, 45% of Spanish questionnaire respondents and 42% of listening session participants—identified housing costs as a major driver of hunger and poverty. A person in Queens, New York, said, “I need an apartment with low rent because soon I will be retired, unable to work, and perhaps my pension will be too low.” Twenty-eight percent of Spanish questionnaire respondents said they have skipped or delayed rent or mortgage payments in the last two years to get food for themselves and others in their household.

The people Feeding America spoke with also mentioned frustrations with the employment market and low wages. They said increases in food and gas prices, without an increase in wages, make it harder to get by.

A respondent in Carroll County, New Hampshire, said the most important way to end hunger would be to have “[a] job that pays a living wage. We are in a tourist area with lots of hotels and outlet stores, so no one hires full time and there is no insurance. ... With all low-wage jobs and no affordable housing, rising food costs, and no public transportation, I don’t know how a young family can survive. That is why so many people have left the area which leads to staff shortages.”

Forty-seven percent of English questionnaire respondents and 43% of Spanish questionnaire respondents said low-wage jobs are a root cause of hunger. People facing hunger say their communities do not offer enough jobs that pay a living wage.

People facing hunger also told Feeding America that navigating the immigration process can be a barrier to thriving.

“We have lived in this Great Country for many years, but we haven’t been able to legalize our migratory status,” said a person in Queens, New York. “In my case I have worked really hard to support my family but after COVID everything went crashing down, and it’s very hard being a single mom and overcome this crisis alone.”

People facing hunger spoke about feeling exploited and lacking opportunity. They discussed the ways their immigration status limits their health care options, creating even more difficult financial decisions.

A lack of access to child care can also prevent people facing hunger from thriving. A person in San Francisco, California, said a lack of child care funding “forces families to have single incomes.”

Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations—**informed by people facing hunger—will expand economic opportunity for neighbors in need.** Only by seeing hunger through the lens of larger, related challenges can our country truly hope to end it once and for all.

Congress should provide better support for individuals seeking employment.

For people who are temporarily unemployed, SNAP is one of the few resources available for receiving food support during a job search. Instead of inflexible penalties that provide a one-size-fits-all approach, Congress should adequately fund and improve state employment and training programs, ensure SNAP recipients are offered training opportunities that align with best practices, and remove the time limit on SNAP benefits to support participants as they find work.

Congress should improve the SNAP benefit-taper structure to reduce the “benefits cliff.”

Raising income thresholds to phase out benefits more gradually, as individuals receiving SNAP benefits begin to earn more income, will provide people with more stability on the path toward self-sufficiency.

Congress should permanently expand the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit.

Of those surveyed by Feeding America, 77% of respondents agreed that Congress should bring back the expanded Child Tax Credit because it significantly reduces child poverty and prevents food insecurity among children. The 2021 expanded Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit together lifted more children above the poverty line than any other economic support program.


Congress and the administration should address the unique challenges to food security faced by immigrant communities, as well as the root causes of these challenges.


People facing hunger are open to a broad set of policies to address high housing costs, including **more affordable housing in communities, rent controls, additional housing aid and oversight programs for landlords.**





Improving Health



Yorba Linda

Food for Families

IMPROVING HEALTH

Food insecurity may be long-term or more temporary for individuals and families, but the resulting health impacts can endure.

Diet-related chronic conditions, like diabetes and high blood pressure, among others, disproportionately affect Black, Latino and Native American populations. Mental health conditions are worsened by food insecurity, while food insecurity can be exacerbated by mental health conditions.

People facing hunger across the country mentioned barriers to accessing both nutritious food and health care services, but the challenges are particularly acute for older adults and people living in rural areas.

Feeding America is committed to addressing the social determinants of health and meeting the food needs and preferences of our neighbors facing hunger. Insights from people facing hunger underscore the connection between hunger relief and improving health outcomes.

92%
**of survey participants agreed
that “food is medicine—if you
have regular access to healthy
foods, you feel better physically,
emotionally, and mentally.”**



Insights from People Facing Hunger

People facing hunger told us unaffordable health care costs were one of the hurdles that prevented them from purchasing nutritious foods. When Feeding America asked people facing hunger what they thought their community needed to thrive by 2030, nearly half (49%) of respondents to our English questionnaire said access to healthier foods, and 24% said access to health care.

“If I want to even be alive in 8 years, I need affordable Healthcare. As it is, I’m having to ration my insulin and can’t even afford my inhaler. I need a living wage, too, so I can pay bills, eat, and keep myself medically healthy,” said a person in Jenkinsburg, Georgia.

Another person, from Cumberland County, Tennessee, expanded on the need for “affordable medical and dental care for adults. As is, it takes a month to get to see a dentist that is in our local health department. The only other option is to drive 2 hours one way to see a dentist that does a sliding scale fee. And those appointments are scarce. I know mine as well as many other’s health are greatly affected by dental problems.”

Neighbors also reported having to make the impossible choice between purchasing nutritious foods and paying for health care.

“My wife has cardiovascular disease and other serious health issues. To thrive we need nutritious foods,” said a person in Colorado City, Colorado. “Instead I live off what ever food bank I can get a ride to. Please help us eat more than four or five meals a week. We can’t afford protein or dairy.”

Among the people Feeding America surveyed, 92% agreed that “food is medicine—if you have regular access to healthy foods, you feel better physically, emotionally, and mentally.”

“**If I want to even be alive in 8 years, I need affordable Healthcare. As it is, I’m having to ration my insulin and can’t even afford my inhaler. I need a living wage, too, so I can pay bills, eat, and keep myself medically healthy.**

JENKINSBURG, GEORGIA

Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations—
informed by people facing hunger—will
improve health outcomes for individuals
and families experiencing food insecurity.

Congress should support and fund produce prescription initiatives through U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) programs. Produce prescription programs allow physicians to immediately provide patients with diet-related diseases—as well as those facing hunger—with fresh produce and other nutritious foods to improve these patients' health. The Feeding America network provides low-cost produce and other goods to hospitals and federally qualified health centers to run produce prescription programs.

HHS should explore ways to work with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to expand coverage for produce prescription programs in hospitals, federally qualified health centers, grocery stores, and farmers markets, as well as to provide technical assistance and other guidance.

Congress should support and provide funding for food pantries located in health care settings. Feeding America food banks work with hospitals to help stock and run on-site pantries. These pantries help medical staff immediately provide healthy food to patients facing hunger who are also at risk of readmission for nutrition-related reasons.

HHS and CMS should provide technical assistance and guidance to hospitals and federally qualified health centers that would benefit from on-site food pantries.



CONCLUSION

Food is foundational to strong families and a strong country, yet there are people facing hunger in every community across the U.S.

In 2021, nearly 34 million people, including 9 million children, experienced food insecurity. The scale of the problem is immense. Yet, if our country comes together, it *is* solvable.

Feeding America is committed to elevating the voices of people facing hunger. We believe that the best solutions to the problems communities face often lie within them, and Feeding America will continue to listen, learn and work alongside our neighbors facing hunger to help advance equitable, community-driven solutions to end hunger. Feeding America will use these and future insights from people facing hunger to help guide our work going forward. Based on these insights, we hope to develop new and strengthen existing relationships with other organizations focused on crucial issues identified by neighbors facing hunger, including affordable housing, public transportation, supporting immigrant communities, and more.

The policy recommendations in this report follow an initial set of recommendations—also informed by the insights of people facing hunger—that Feeding America made in July 2022 to the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. For a more detailed exploration of policies to equitably improve federal nutrition programs, address economic barriers to food security and improve health outcomes, please see our [initial submission to the White House](#).

In the survey conducted as part of our *Elevating Voices to End Hunger Together* initiative, 92% of respondents agreed that to actually reduce hunger, the government, the private sector, nonprofits, local institutions and communities must come together to create solutions.

Feeding America agrees that bold solutions require broad support. We can harness the power of a nation to end hunger by engaging every citizen, every elected official and every organization in a unified effort.

Take action today by volunteering at [your local food bank](#) or donating to hunger-relief organizations. You can also [help advocate for systemic change](#)—policies that help ensure that everyone in the U.S., no matter their race, background or ZIP code, can have access to the food and resources they need to thrive. Join us in the fight against hunger.

Together, we can end the hunger crisis in America and build thriving, equitable communities.



DONATE. VOLUNTEER. ADVOCATE. EDUCATE.

Feeding America® is the largest hunger-relief organization in the United States. Through a network of more than 200 food banks, 21 statewide food bank associations, and over 60,000 partner agencies, food pantries and meal programs, we helped provide 6.6 billion meals to tens of millions of people in need last year. Feeding America also supports programs that prevent food waste and improve food security among the people we serve; brings attention to the social and systemic barriers that contribute to food insecurity in our nation; and advocates for legislation that protects people from going hungry.



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