

HUNGER IN WISCONSIN

Before the pandemic, food insecurity levels were the lowest they had been in 20 years, yet 515,930 Wisconsinites. COVID-19 exacerbated food insecurity rates across the country. **Feeding America estimates that in CY2021, 605,650 Wisconsinites or 10.4% will experience food insecurity. This includes 204,600 Wisconsin children or 16.2% of Wisconsin's children.**¹

The COVID-19 pandemic brought hunger in America to the forefront of the public consciousness. Every food bank in the Feeding America nationwide network reported seeing more people turning to them for help. A new Charitable Food Assistance Participation estimate, issued by Feeding America, shows that at least 60 million people turned to the charitable food sector – food banks, food pantries, and other private food assistance programs – for help in 2020.²

In 2020, the network distributed 79 million pounds of food to households in all 72 counties of the state, an increase of 62% over 2019. About 42% of those coming through our pantries and mobile distribution lines have never relied on the emergency food network before.³

Food banks are doing everything possible to continue to meet the challenge, but we can't do it alone. In addition to boosting SNAP benefits to offset record high grocery prices, we need more USDA food purchases and federal relief funding to ensure that we have the food and infrastructure capacity to continue to do what we do best, work to end hunger for Wisconsinites.

Food Assistance Programs Work

Food assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), provide a vital bridge to help get people through difficult times. Food assistance programs are designed to protect the most vulnerable.

SNAP participation expands when the economy worsens and shrinks when it improves. Programs are income-based, targeting those most in need. Currently, for each meal provided by Feeding America food banks, SNAP provides nine meals. Two-thirds of SNAP recipients are either children, the elderly or people with disabilities. Among adults on SNAP who are able to work, more than half are working and about 80% work in the year before or after receiving SNAP.

Commodity purchasing programs, such as the Temporary Emergency Food assistance Program, help provide healthy food directly to those who need it. TEFAP foods provide approximately 20% of the food distributed by the Feeding America network each year.

Child nutrition programs, such as the National School Lunch Program, are important tools for improving the health, education and behavior of low income students. Food assistance to the elderly and to disabled individuals helps them to lead healthy lives on limited incomes.



¹ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/press-room/local-food-insecurity-projections>

² <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/Charitable%20Food%20Assistance%20Participation%20in%202020.pdf>

³ https://feedingwi.org/data_research/covidpulsesurvey.php

2020-2021 Policy Priorities

We urge Congress to consider budget reconciliation legislation that includes funding to expand hunger-fighting programs:

- **Extend and expand the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program**, currently operating as Pandemic EBT (a program that provides extra money for households with children who have lost access to nutritious school and child care meals), to ensure the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has the authority needed to continue this important program during summers and for future school closings. In addition, Congress must extend and strengthen Child Nutrition program waiver authority to ensure the flexibility needed to continue critical food assistance operations that are keeping kids fed.
- **Extend the temporary increases in the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit** to provide families with children and working adults with additional critical economic resources.
- **Expand the Community Eligibility Program (CEP)** by increasing funding, lowering the eligibility threshold, and expanding automatic enrollment to allow schools and school districts to provide free school meals to an additional nine million children.
- **In addition, Congress must increase funds for USDA food purchases to help food banks meet the need for food assistance in their communities.** Specifically, we urge Congress to support an additional \$900 million for food purchases through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and flexible local food purchasing programs, so food banks can help families and children get the nutritious food they need.

Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR)

- Congress needs to pursue a two-pronged strategy that will make it easier for communities to establish summer feeding sites in underserved areas and give states the flexibility to feed kids in alternate ways because **children consume up to 50 percent of their total daily calories at school during the school year** – but when school is out for the summer, millions of children who rely on school breakfast and lunch programs do not access meal assistance.

Military Hunger

- Congress must support the creation of a Military Family Basic Needs Allowance in the fiscal year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to provide a monthly stipend to service members whose income is below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. In a survey of military households, **7 percent reported experiencing trouble getting enough food** during the preceding year. This translates to more than 90,000 service men and women.
- **We have an obligation to ensure that the servicemembers who protect our country do not have the added worry of having access to adequate and nutritious food to feed themselves and their families.**

About Feeding Wisconsin

Feeding Wisconsin is the state association of the six Feeding America food banks in Wisconsin. Together, they serve almost 1,000 local food programs. Our mission is to help our food banks, partners, and public fight hunger, improve health, and strengthen local communities. Through our food banks and food pantries, we work to ensure that everybody has access to the food and benefits they need to work, learn, play and live healthy lives. Together, we are leading the way Forward together toward a healthy and hunger-free Wisconsin.

Visit our website at www.FeedingWI.org. For more information or to schedule a visit, contact Stephanie Jung Dorfman, Executive Director, Feeding Wisconsin, at sdorfman@feedingwi.org or 608-960-4517.