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Hunger in America

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## Hunger in America

### What is this indicator?

The report, *Hunger in America 2010*, is based on independent research conducted on behalf of Feeding America by Mathematica Policy Research, a non-partisan social policy research firm based in Princeton, New Jersey. Mathematica is nationally recognized as a leader in the field of human services research. Feeding America contracted with Mathematica to work with 185 network member participants who voluntarily agreed to collect data in their communities. The methodology for the *Hunger in America 2010* report includes data collected from February through June 2009. Feeding America collected quantitative feedback from 61,000 face-to-face in-depth interviews with people seeking emergency food assistance and more than 37,000 agency surveys, making this the largest, most comprehensive study ever conducted on domestic hunger. The results are based on surveys conducted at food pantries, soup kitchens, and other emergency feeding programs.

### What are the key findings?

A landmark study from Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization, reports that more than 37 million people, one in eight Americans -- including 14 million children and nearly 3 million seniors -- receive emergency food each year through the nation's network of food banks and the agencies they serve. The findings represent a staggering 46 percent increase since the organization's previously released study in 2006.

Each week, approximately 5.7 million people receive emergency food assistance from an agency served by a



Feeding America member. This is a 27percent increase over numbers reported in *Hunger in America 2006*, which reported that 4.5 million people were served each week.

These numbers are based on surveys conducted at emergency feeding centers, such as soup kitchens and food pantries, but do not factor in many individuals also served at non-emergency locations, such as Kids Cafe programs and senior centers.

### Client Households

- 76 percent (10 million) of client households served are food insecure, meaning they do not always know where they will find their next meal.
- 36 percent of these client households are experiencing food insecurity with hunger, meaning they are sometimes completely without a source of food.
- 79 percent (11 million) of households with children served are also food insecure.
- Of the 37 million people the Feeding America network serves:
- 70 percent of households have incomes below the federal poverty line.
- The average monthly income for client households is \$940.
- 36 percent of households have one or more adults who is working.
- 10 percent of client households are homeless.

### Tough Choices

Many of the client households served by Feeding America food banks report that their household incomes are inadequate to cover their basic household expenses.

- 46 percent of client households served report having to choose between paying for utilities or heating fuel and food. 39 percent of client households said they had to choose between paying for rent or a mortgage and food.
- 34 percent of client households report having to choose between paying for medical bills and food.
- 35 percent of client households must choose between transportation and food.
- One in four client households (24 percent) do not have health insurance and nearly half of our adult clients report that they have unpaid medical and hospital bills.

Thirty percent of households report having at least one member of their household in poor health.

### Role of Federal Government

- 54.4 percent of pantries, 33.5 percent of kitchens, and 31.4 percent of shelters receive food from TEFAP.
- 41 percent of client households are receiving SNAP (formerly food stamps) benefits, an increase of 64 percent over 2006.
- 54 percent of client households with children ages 0 to 3 participate in the WIC program, compared to 51 percent in 2006.
- Among households with school-age children, 62 percent participate in the federal school lunch program and 54 percent participate in the school breakfast program.

### Agencies

- Feeding America food banks provide food and groceries to 33,500 food pantries, 4,500 soup kitchens and 3,600 emergency shelters.
- 68 percent of pantries, 42 percent of soup kitchens, and 15 percent of emergency shelters rely solely on volunteers and have no paid staff.
- 55 percent, are faith-based agencies affiliated with churches, mosques, synagogues and other religious organizations; 33 percent are other types of nonprofit organizations.

USDA reported in November 2009 that an estimated 49 million people, including 17 million children, are at risk of hunger. Hunger in America 2010 reinforces the dramatically increasing need for food assistance in the United States, with 70 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens and 73 percent of emergency shelters reporting that they are facing one or more problems that threaten their ability to continue operating. Problems relating to funds and food supplies were the two most commonly cited threats.

Among other key comparative findings between the

2010 and 2006 reports:

- 50 percent increase in the number of children served annually.
- 66 percent increase in the number of Hispanics served annually.
- 26 percent increase in the number of African-Americans served annually.
- 64 percent increase in the number of households with seniors facing very low food security—or hunger.
- 59 percent increase in the number of client households reporting they have to choose between paying their rent or mortgage and food.
- 40 percent increase in the number of client households with at least one adult working.
- 60 percent increase in the number of clients who report that someone in their household does not have access to health insurance.
- 60 percent increase in the number of client households that have an unpaid medical or hospital bill.
- 64 percent increase in the number of client households receiving SNAP benefits.

### What are the implications?

Hunger in America 2010 is the first research study to capture the significant connection between the recent economic downturn and an increased need for emergency food assistance. The number of children and adults in need of food as a result of experiencing food insecurity has significantly increased.

More than one in three client households are experiencing very low food security—or hunger—a 54 percent increase in the number of households compared to four years ago.

An estimated 5.7 million people receive emergency food assistance each week from a food pantry, soup kitchen, or other agency served by one of Feeding America's more than 200 food banks. This is a 27 percent increase over numbers reported in Hunger in America 2006, which reported that 4.5 million people were served each week.

### References

- Feed America (2010, February). Hunger in America 2010. Retrieved February 23, 2010, from [www.feedingamerica.org/hungerstudy](http://www.feedingamerica.org/hungerstudy).

**Census questions?**

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