

## FOOD INSECURITY BRIEF – FEEDING AMERICA, 2019

Though many of us may not realize the grave disparities that exist in our own communities, people struggle with hunger in every county and congressional district in California. They could be our neighbors, kids in our children's classes – the possibilities go on.

Although the economy is improving, millions of Americans continue to struggle. The USDA estimates that 40 million people, including more than 12 million children, in the United States are food insecure as of 2017. That means 1 in 8 individuals (13%) and 1 in 6 children (17%) live in households without consistent access to adequate food.

The prevalence of food insecurity decreased slightly from 2016, but rates remain higher than before the Great Recession in 2007. For the ninth consecutive year, Feeding America has conducted the Map the Meal Gap study to improve our understanding of how food insecurity and food costs vary at the local level. By better understanding variations in local need, communities can develop more targeted strategies to reach people struggling with hunger.

### CHILD FOOD INSECURITY

Food insecurity has the potential to be harmful to individuals of any age, but it can be especially devastating to children. The USDA estimates that more than 12 million children in the United States live in food-insecure households as of 2017. That means that 1 in 6 children (17%) may not have consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

In all 50 states and Washington, D.C., the estimated rate of child food insecurity is higher than the rate of overall food insecurity.

The consequences and costs of food insecurity for all ages make addressing the issue an economic and social imperative. In particular, inadequate nutrition can permanently alter children's brain architecture and stunt their intellectual capacity, affecting children's learning, social interaction and productivity.

### HEALTH, BEHAVIOR, AND EDUCATION

There is a broad base of literature illustrating links between food insecurity and poor child health and behavioral outcomes at every age. For example, food-insecure women are more likely to experience birth complications than food-secure women. One indicator of child and maternal health is low birthweight among infants, which is more common among counties with the highest rates of child food insecurity than across all counties (10% versus 8%).

Furthermore, children struggling with food insecurity may be at greater risk for stunted

development, anemia and asthma, oral health problems and hospitalization. Overall, food insecurity is linked with poorer physical quality of life, which may prevent children from fully engaging in daily activities. At school, food-insecure children are at increased risk of falling behind their food-secure peers both academically and socially; food insecurity is linked to lower reading and mathematics test scores, and they may be more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, including hyperactivity, aggression and anxiety.

### HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF FOOD INSECURITY

Healthy bodies and minds require nutritious meals at every age. Inconsistent access to adequate amounts of nutritious food can have a negative impact on the health of individuals at all ages. The USDA estimates that as of 2017, 40 million people, including more than 12 million children, in the United States are food insecure. That means 1 in 8 individuals (13%) and 1 in 6 children (17%) live in homes without consistent access to adequate food for everyone to live healthy, active lives. This is a national problem with local health implications for individuals and communities across the country.

An analysis of county data on health indicators and food insecurity shows that communities with the highest rates of food insecurity face a higher prevalence for diseases and other measures that are tied to health.

### THE CYCLE OF HUNGER AND HEALTH

The intersection of hunger and health can be depicted as a cycle.<sup>1</sup> First, a food-insecure household is forced to engage in coping strategies, often including the consumption of cheaper foods that are high in calories, but low in nutritional value. Reliance on less healthy foods can lead to poor nutrition, and chronic diet-related diseases such as diabetes. In turn, these chronic illnesses can worsen existing disabilities or other illnesses or result in inability to work and increased healthcare costs, which further restrict the household food budget. Once a person or family enters the cycle, it can be increasingly difficult to escape it. A significant number of households served by the Feeding America network have members living with a chronic disease like diabetes (33% of households) or hypertension (58% of households) and are regularly confronted with these challenges to managing their health.

### SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) play a critical role in helping low-income families break out of the cycle of hunger and diet-related disease. Both programs augment households' food budgets, allowing them to purchase more healthful foods, and provide nutrition education to participants. A 2013 review of SNAP nutrition education, also known as SNAP Ed, found that it increased both consumption and

willingness to consume fruits and vegetables among child participants.<sup>12</sup> These programs, along with other federal nutrition programs that target specific populations, make up the front line of defense against hunger.

### ABOUT FEEDING SAN DIEGO

In FY19, through the generosity of community supporters, Feeding San Diego provided 26 million meals in San Diego and Imperial Valley to children, families, seniors struggling with hunger.

One in eight people — including one in six children — in San Diego County experience food insecurity. According to the USDA, food insecurity is when households lack enough food for an active, healthy life and have limited or uncertain availability of nutritious foods. Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap study estimates 61 million meals are needed in San Diego to fill the difference between what individuals in our area can afford to provide for their families and what they need to thrive. Feeding San Diego is dedicated to closing this meal gap and supporting the health and wellness of our entire community.

Feeding San Diego is solving hunger in our community. We know food is an abundant resource, not a scarce commodity. While 40 percent of perfectly good food goes to waste, San Diego families are struggling to fill their pantries every day. Feeding San Diego fights hunger locally by working hand-in-hand with partner non-profit agencies, local school districts, corporate partners, and a network of volunteers to serve 63,000 children, families, and seniors in need each week. Our model of operation depends on preventing the food that already exists in our community from going to waste, and instead, connecting it to people in need. We prioritize the reduction of waste, conservation of resources, and reversal of environmental damage stemming from our current food system.

Feeding San Diego is one of 200 food banks nationwide who are members of Feeding America, the largest domestic hunger-relief organization in the United States. Operating as an independent non-profit organization, Feeding San Diego's national membership ensures high operational efficiency and gives us to access donated food, as well as professional resources.

### ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Food retailers and distributors discard enough food every day to feed each person facing food insecurity. Feeding San Diego helps prevent that food from needlessly going to the landfill and, instead, quickly distributes it into the community. At Feeding San Diego, 97 percent of our food is rescued and would otherwise go to the landfill. For example, our programs capture fresh produce that was not profitable enough for a farmer to harvest or rescuing the whole-grain cereal that failed to sell at the grocery

store. By directing useable food away from waste, our programs reduce the environmental impact of expanding landfills and spiking methane gas emissions from decomposing organic waste.

Recently, Feeding San Diego has been recognized for our environmentally responsible operations. The City of San Diego granted Feeding San Diego the Business Waste Reduction & Recycling Award for our recycling efforts in our distribution center and repurposing damaged produce for livestock feed. The Sierra Club San Diego Chapter named us the recipient of a Fantastic Environmental Action Taken (FEAT) Award for our innovative approach of rescuing and distributing food that would otherwise go to waste, resulting in a major contribution to the environment.

Partner Agencies | 150 partners  
FY20 Goal: 18,886,667 meals  
Annual Budget: \$2.8M

Feeding San Diego partners with local nonprofit organizations who operate their own food pantries and food distribution programs in neighborhoods throughout San Diego County, including Alpha Project, San Diego Rescue Mission, PATH San Diego, and many other reputable organizations with expertise in addressing specific human needs. We provide deliveries of food, coordinate their pickup of rescued food from donors and retail partners, and ensure food safety and compliance standards are in place to protect people in need. In addition, Feeding San Diego provides limited cash and in-kind grants to support partner agencies in strengthening and expanding their capacity to serve additional people in need.

Feeding Kids Initiative | 138 sites  
FY20 Goal: 2,349,952 meals  
Annual Budget: \$1.43M

Feeding San Diego serves food-insecure children and youth through a variety of distributions at their schools, afterschool activities, and summer programs. Across all programs, the Feeding Kids Initiative provides 2,349,952 meals annually to local children and families.

- School Pantry Program: 40 partner sites | 1,924,780 meals | 6,240 households per month: The School Pantry program is our largest childhood-hunger relief service and one of our most efficient way to put healthy, no-cost food into the hands of children and families in San Diego through twice-monthly distributions at Title 1 schools.
- Backpack Program: 13 partner sites | 219,600 meals | 1,220 children per month: The BackPack Program provides local students with easily transported food to take home for the weekend. This weekly program helps bridge the gap between

weekday school meals, ensuring children are well-nourished and ready to learn on Monday.

- Regional School Break Program: 4 sites | 62,333 meals | 680 households per month: The Regional School Break program operates farmer's market-style pantries in each region of the county (north, east, south, and central) during summer, spring, and winter school breaks.
- After School Meals Program: 25 sites | 77,501 meals and snacks | 426 children per year: The After School Meals program helps meet children's needs after school by providing a supper or snack at convenient sites throughout San Diego. This program is primarily funded by the USDA through the California Department of Education.
- Summer Meals Program: 25 sites | 22,405 meals and snacks | 789 children per year: The Summer Meals program helps meet children's needs during the summer by providing free and nutritious breakfasts, lunches, and/or snacks at convenient sites throughout San Diego. This program is funded by the USDA through the California Department of Education.

Feeding Families Initiative | 27 sites

FY20 Goal: 1,405,253 meals

Annual Budget: \$522K

Through our Feeding Families Initiative, Feeding San Diego works to provide healthy meals to families across the county through direct-to-client distributions in rural areas and college campuses.

- Mobile Pantry Program: 16 sites | 1,041,920 meals: Feeding San Diego reaches 2,360 families in the rural north and east areas of San Diego through the Mobile Pantry program, a unique traveling pantry operation. One of our trucks visits each site on a twice-monthly basis to deliver food to underserved populations, many of whom are low-income households, farmers, migrant workers, and seniors.
- College Partnerships Program | 11 sites | 363,333 meals: Feeding San Diego serves post-secondary students and their families attending community college and continuing education courses through our College Partnerships program. Five campuses host farmer's market-style pantries on a monthly or weekly basis, primarily using rescued food from our generous food donors and retail partners. Feeding San Diego provides food to 2,075 households per month through these distributions.

Feeding Heroes Initiative | 9 sites

FY20 Goal: 789,170 meals

Annual Budget: \$303K

Through the Feeding Heroes Initiative, Feeding San Diego is committed to increasing access to food for active-duty military and veteran households facing food insecurity. Feeding San Diego reaches these households through military-focused community partner distributions and direct-service programs. 1,125 households per month are served through direct-service sites, including two special military-focused distributions, one Mobile Pantry site, and three School Pantries.

Feeding Seniors Initiative | 4 sites

FY20 Goal: 1,937,866

Annual Budget: \$301K

Feeding San Diego feeds seniors and older individuals through a combination of direct distributions, senior-housing complex services, community partnerships, and a meal-delivery partnership with Meals on Wheels East County. At our distributions, produce and healthy shelf-stable items are provided on a monthly basis. An estimated 10% of all those we serve through our community partners are senior living on fixed incomes.

- Direct Service: 3 sites monthly | 45,600 meals
- Meals on Wheels East County: twice monthly | 3,600 meals
- Partner Agencies: 1,888,667 meals

### REMAINING MEAL GAP

Feeding America's 2019 Map the Meal Gap Study determined the annual meal gap in San Diego County is 61,524,500. Last year, Feeding San Diego distributed 26 million meals. Other hunger-relief organizations provided an additional 23.3 million meals, which results in an estimated unmet meal gap of 12,224,500 meals.

Thank you for your support as we work to reduce this gap and ensure people facing hunger in San Diego can access enough healthy food to thrive!